What is Operation Medicine Drop?

Operation Medicine Drop is a partnership of Safe Kids North Carolina, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, the Riverkeepers of North Carolina, NC State Bureau of Investigation, Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of North Carolina and local law enforcement agencies working together to encourage the public to safely dispose of unused and unwanted medication.

By providing safe and secure ways for people to get rid of unwanted prescription and over-the-counter medications, Operation Medicine Drop helps prevent accidental poisonings and drug abuse while protecting our waters. Since 2010, Operation Medicine Drop has collected more than 78 million at almost 1800 events.

When will Operation Medicine Drop events be held?

Operation Medicine Drop will be held on March 29, 2016 in conjunction with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency’ 11th Annual National Take Back Initiative.

Members of the public are invited to take-back events being staged across the state to drop off medications. Law enforcement partners will help dispose of the medications in the same secure way they dispose of other drug items. To find an event near you, visit the Safe Kids North Carolina website at www.ncsafekids.org.

Why are Operation Medicine Drop and the National Take Back Initiative so important?

When excess medications are kept around the home, they create dangerous opportunities for prescription drug abuse and accidental poisonings.

Poisonings from prescription medications has increased by nearly 300 percent in recent years in North Carolina. While most parents and caregivers are familiar with the poisonings hazards presented by cleaning supplies, it’s important to know that since 1999, 91 percent of all unintentional poisonings were caused by prescription or over-the-counter medications. (Source: N.C. Injury & Violence Prevention Branch) The best way to prevent poisoning is to remove the risk from the environment.

Why can’t I just flush my old medicines down the toilet or throw them in the trash?

When medications are flushed or thrown away in the garbage, they can contaminate water sources. Such contamination has been found in waterways here in North Carolina. Our rivers and streams are particularly vulnerable to the effects of drug contamination. Aquatic life from the smallest plankton to our largest fishes is harmed when exposure is constant and occurs during crucial times of their life cycles.
Important Facts and Figures

- In two years’ time in North Carolina, Operation Medicine Drop retrieved and destroyed more than 11 million dosages of medications.

- The average North Carolinian fills 17 prescriptions annually, which adds up to over 127 million prescriptions filled statewide each year. Studies show that as much as 40% of the drugs dispensed are never used.

- In 1999, the number of unintentional poisoning deaths in North Carolina was 279. By 2010, that number more than tripled to 947.

- More than 91% of all unintentional poisonings are by over-the-counter or prescription medications.

- Approximately 40% of injuries from unintentional poisonings occur in children under five years old.

- If current trends continue, unintentional poisoning deaths will surpass motor vehicle deaths as the leading cause of injury death in North Carolina by 2017.

- In the U.S., poisoning is now the leading cause of unintentional injury death, and nearly 9 out of 10 poisoning deaths are caused by drugs.

- One in 5 teens has abused prescription stimulants and tranquilizers.

- In 2004, the United States Geological Survey identified 100 different pharmaceuticals in surface water. Significant contamination is occurring in North Carolina and in over 80% of U.S. waterways that have been tested.

Prescription Drug Public Safety Issues and Statistics

- Unused or expired prescription medications are a public safety issue, leading to accidental poisoning, overdose, and abuse.

- Pharmaceutical drugs, particularly controlled substances, taken without a prescription or a doctor's supervision can be just as dangerous as taking illicit drugs.

- The non-medical use of prescription drugs ranks second only to marijuana as the most prevalent category of drug abuse in the United States, according to the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

- Two-and-a-half times more Americans currently abuse prescription drugs than the number of those using cocaine, hallucinogens, heroin, and inhalants combined, according to the 2010 NSDUH. The 2010 NSDUH reports that in 2010, 7 million people over the age of 12 used prescription drugs for non-medical reasons during the month before being surveyed.

- One in twelve high-school seniors used the pharmaceutical narcotic Vicodin for non-medical purposes during the previous year, according to 2010 Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF) data. Over 5 percent used OxyContin, a potent narcotic, during the previous year.

- Six of the top ten substances abused by twelfth graders in the year prior to the survey were prescription or over-the-counter medications, the 2010 MTF also shows.
• The 2010 NSDUH reports that 2.4 million people 12 and older abused prescription drugs for the first time last year, an average of 6,600 a day.

• Two million people began their abuse of any drug for the first time ever with pain relievers (second only to marijuana, with 2.4 million), according to the 2010 NSDUH. Of those, 1.9 million of those people went on to become dependent, and 406,000 people received specialty treatment for addiction to pain relievers in 2010.

• Of those 12 and older who abused pain relievers in the past year, the majority (55 percent) got them from friends and family for free, including from their home medicine cabinets, according to the 2010 NSDUH. Another 17.3 percent reported they got the drug from one doctor. Only 4.4 percent got them from a drug dealer or stranger, and only 0.4% (four-tenths of one percent, or slightly more than four people out of a thousand) bought them on the Internet.

• Visits by individuals to hospital emergency rooms involving the misuse or abuse or pharmaceutical drugs have doubled over the past five years and, for the third year in a row, exceed the number of visits involving illicit drugs, according to 2009 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) data released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

• Emergency room visits involving pharmaceutical drugs in 2009 (1.2 million) are up 10 percent over 2008 (1.1 million), according to 2009 DAWN data.

Where can I get more information about Operation Medicine Drop?

• Visit www.ncsafekids.org or call 888-347-3737.