Take-Back Event Instructions & Toolkit

© 2011 All materials and attachments. This information is provided for educational and program development purposes only and is current as of January 2011. Please verify all information given out after that date to protect you and your agency from liability. Operation Medicine Drop is a program to collect unused and expired prescription medication to reduce unintentional poisonings.

The Operation Medicine Drop Toolkit and attachments are provided by the following agencies: Safe Kids North Carolina, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, State Bureau of Investigation, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and Carolinas Medical Center.
Why is Operation Medicine Drop Needed?

Unused and expired medications in the United States and other countries exact an incredible toll on patient safety and public health. In the United States, an estimated $1 billion of prescription drugs are thrown away each year. Increasing availability, marketing, and purchase of prescription and over-the-counter pharmaceutical products, coupled with the tendency of patients to stockpile drugs at home, is a unique phenomenon that has long been ignored. Compounding this problem is that no comprehensive state or federal program exists to safely collect unwanted drugs and dispose of them properly, except through reverse distributors and only for large healthcare institutions.

Many significant problems are associated with unused and expired drugs in the home. Drugs often are left unsecured in cabinets and on counters. Improper use of drugs may cause an overdose and drug interactions. Accidental poisoning from ingestion of drugs among children and pets often occurs in homes where medicine is easily accessible. For example, about 40 percent of poisoning among children occurs in grandparents’ homes.

Drug diversion — theft, burglary, illegal possession, and drug abuse — is a major crime in households where narcotics are present. All are a significant patient safety problem of epidemic proportion. Furthermore, the disposable of unwanted drugs as household trash or by flushing them down the sink or toilet is unwise and dangerous to the environment, potentially contaminating the water supply.

Unintentional poisoning deaths and injuries are increasing nationwide. Children ages 1-5 account for 23 percent of all emergency department visits related to poisoning and these types of injuries result in a high death rate of infants under the age of one due to their smaller size. In North Carolina in 2008, unintentional poisoning was second to only motor vehicle crashes as the cause of unintentional injury death among children. And among people 35 to 54 years old, unintentional poisoning caused more deaths than motor vehicle crashes nationwide and in North Carolina. (Data provided by the N.C. Division of Public Health.)

The most common culprits for children are access to the following drugs:

- **Over-the-Counter Medications**: cough and cold, iron tablets, antihistamines and anti-inflammatory medications
- **Prescription Medications**: anti-depressants, narcotics and recreational drugs

For adults, the largest risk is misuse and overuse of narcotic pain medications. Following medication is poisoning from household products including bleach, disinfectants, pesticides and detergents/cleaning products.
How Can My Community Prevent Unintentional Poisoning From Medications?

One intervention to reduce unintentional poisoning is the collection of unused and expired medication at community events. Best practices for a take-back program are described below for replication in your community.

Goal:
To create a community-based program to collect unused and expired prescription medication to reduce unintentional poisonings.

Instructions for Holding an Operation Medicine Drop Take-Back Event:

✓ Law Enforcement Agency Partnership – To conduct a secure Operation Medicine Drop Event, you must partner with a law enforcement agency. Since some of the medication may be “controlled,” you must have a law enforcement agency contact that will take custody of the substances. This may be your local sheriff’s office or the narcotics unit of your local police department.

   Law enforcement agencies that participate must complete and send the DEA Authorization Letter prior to conducting the take-back event. The letter template is included as an attachment to this toolkit.

✓ Volunteers – You will need one law enforcement officer per site and two additional volunteers to help with collection. It is preferred that you partner with a pharmacist or pharmacy tech to answer customer questions and to assist with data collection of prescriptions collected. Local substance abuse coalitions are very interested in this topic and can assist you with events as well.

✓ Select locations or sites – Neutral locations such as retailers, pharmacies, community centers and churches are excellent locations for these events. Reserving these locations may need to occur 3-4 months in advance of the event – many public sites such as grocery stores have requirements of approval and a cap on outreach conducted at each site by month. Most take-back events will last approximately 3-4 hours.

✓ Paperwork – You must keep a log of all the medications turned in at the take-back event. There is an electronic log as well as paper copy for usage. The electronic version automatically calculates. This project will focus on estimations of drugs collected and pounds. It is preferred that you contact a pharmacist or pharmacy student to track this data — it is likely that the public will bring their medications in an unmarked bag and not in the original containers. Use the Prescription Log attachment included in this toolkit to track the medications collected or the online prescription log available at www.ncsafekids.org.
This record will also provide an effective measure of the take-back event’s community impact.

✓ **Other supplies** – You will need a table, table cloth, latex gloves, signs, clipboard, pens, donation collection box, permanent markers (Sharpie pens), 4-5 large containers (96 gallon trash containers) with locks, and chairs.

Law enforcement agencies will need cardboard boxes and tape to place medication in for incineration.

✓ **Marketing** – Posters, brochures and flyers are the preferred method to advertise the event. Customize and distribute flyers in medical provider offices, pharmacies, churches and schools. There is a customizable poster available at [www.ncsafekids.org](http://www.ncsafekids.org).

You should also contact your local media outlets and invite the media to your take-back event by sending them a news release or event advisory. You can find template media materials online, [www.ncsafekids.org](http://www.ncsafekids.org) and personalize them for your event. Make sure your event is “visual” for the media by posting signs, and having marked law enforcement, fire or EMS vehicles and uniformed officers at the event location. Be prepared to do an interview at the event.

✓ **Literature** – You should provide handouts to event attendees explaining how to properly dispose of medications and the consequences of poisoning. Poison prevention materials may be obtained through Safe Kids North Carolina’s web site, [www.ncsafekids.org](http://www.ncsafekids.org) or through your local substance abuse coalition. Several agencies listed in the Resource List attachment of this toolkit may also be able to provide materials.

✓ **Medication disposal** – You will need several large containers to hold the medication at the event and then later to separate the medications. A locked trash container with a hole in the top to drop medicine containers is preferred. These can be obtained through a partnership with your local public works department. It is recommended the medication is incinerated. Bank boxes are another useful storage container.

Liquids and sharps will also have to be separated and a plan made to dispose of all of these materials. Sharps should be destroyed through the traditional Personal Protective Equipment disposal boxes which EMS departments, fire departments or hospitals may be able to provide. Disposal will need to be arranged with your local law enforcement division in the same manner that they dispose of other drug items.

✓ **Signage** – Your event should not collect biohazard materials. You should clearly display a sign on your collection table that states “Operation Medicine Drop
CANNOT collect biohazardous materials.” (Sign is included as an attachment to this toolkit)