
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Medicine Disposal Options for School Nurses

School students often are required to take over-the-counter medicine and prescription medicine while on school premises. Generally, schools require that all medicine be delivered to a school nurse's office by a legal guardian of a student with written dose and dispensing instructions. The school nurse is then responsible for securely storing the medicine and dispensing it to the students during the day.

When school nurses are informed by students' legal guardians to discontinue dispensing medicine or when the school year ends, the nurse may have accumulated a large quantity of medicine. Despite efforts by the school to have legal guardians to pick up the medicine from the school nurse's office, often nurses are left with a large quantity of medicine in liquid, solid and aerosol form that must be disposed of. From a legal liability standpoint, it is strongly recommended that schools develop stringent policies that force legal guardians to pick-up students' medication from the school nurse's office to prevent this situation from occurring. In order to prevent accidental poisonings or drug abuse, a school nurse should never send a student home with unused medicine.

If a school nurse is left with medicine from students after attempting to return it to the legal guardians, this material will require disposal. The recommended procedure for disposal of solid or liquid medicine is:

- 1) Pour medicine into a sealable plastic bag. It is not advisable to mix different types of medicine as dangerous chemical reactions may occur.
- 2) If the medicine is a solid, add a small amount of water to dissolve it.
- 3) Add any undesirable substance – such as dirt, coffee grounds or kitty litter – to the liquid medicine in the plastic bag.
- 4) Use marker to black out any personal contact information on the empty medicine container prior to disposing of it in the trash.
- 5) Seal the bag and transport it immediately to the solid waste collection facility for disposal. Disposal of the medicine in the trash dumpster on school grounds is not advisable unless the Dumpster is found to be locked and tamper proof.

Medicine in an inhaler form may be disposed of directly in the trash collection bin at a solid waste facility. Medicine should never be flushed down the toilet unless accompanying product information instructs that it is safe to do so.

The disposal instructions above are meant to apply to only the disposal of medicine that was originally intended to be used at the school. The medicines possessed by the school nurse in the above scenario are considered to be equivalent to household wastes. Household wastes are not subject to the same regulations as wastes generated from other sources and are not regulated as stringently. If a school nurse offered to collect, store and dispose of medicine not associated with the intended use by students or staff on school grounds, the medicines collected would not be considered a household waste and the activity would be subject to extensive federal and state laws and regulations.

While not required by law or regulation, the administration of a school or school nurses can develop procedures regarding the documentation and verification of medicine disposal. This may be accomplished by recording the type and quantity of medicine disposed of, as well as a requirement that all medicine disposed of by a nurse be witnessed by another employee of the school.

If a school nurse needs to dispose of sharps (needles and syringes), information about proper disposal options may be found at www.des.nh.gov.

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov or visit our website at www.des.nh.gov.

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of August. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.