

5 tips for safely storing opioids at home

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Andis Robeznieks

Senior News Writer

Treat your prescription pain medications like you would your jewelry, cash or other valuables, which means keeping them in a secure place. Safe medication storage can mean keeping these prescription drugs under lock and key, if necessary.

That's the message from Partnership for Drug-Free Kids and others.

Give these five basic, common-sense tips to patients and families. They should:

- Store opioids in a locked container.
- Keep opioids in their original package.
- Keep opioids out of children's reach.
- Do not share your medication.
- Safely dispose of unused pills.

There were almost 22,000 pediatric emergency department visits related to prescription opioid poisonings between 2006 and 2012, according to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which also cites a survey finding that almost 25 percent of grandparents said they keep prescription drugs in "easy access places."

SAMHSA further recommends that children never be told that medication is candy to persuade them to take it.

The AMA Opioid Task Force strongly supports the education and awareness of physicians, patients, policymakers and other key stakeholders regarding the risks of prescription opioids and other medications if they are not taken as prescribed—as well as steps needed to ensure safe storage and disposal of expired, unwanted or unused medications.

The AMA Opioid Task Force urges all physicians and other health care professionals to take three steps that can help.

First, physicians and other health care professionals need to talk to their patients and educate them about safe use of prescription opioids—more than 70 percent of people using opioid analgesics for nonmedical reasons get them from family or friends. Opioid analgesics should only be taken as directed since misuse or diversion of these products can be illegal, extremely harmful and even deadly.

Second, remind patients that medications should be stored out of reach of children, and in a safe place—preferably locked—to prevent other family members and visitors from taking them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that prescribers “discuss risks to household members and other individuals if opioids are intentionally or unintentionally shared with others for whom they are not prescribed, including the possibility that others might experience overdose at the same or at lower dosage than prescribed for the patient.”

Third, talk to your patients about the most appropriate way to dispose of expired, unwanted and unused medications. The preferred option is that unwanted or unused pills, liquids or other medications should be disposed of in a local “take back” or mail back program or medication drop box at a police station, Drug Enforcement Administration-authorized collection site or pharmacy, if the pharmacy has a secure drop-box program.

Visit the [AMA End the Opioid Epidemic](https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/opioids/5-tips-safely-storing-opioids-home) site to learn more.