

# Promote safe storage and disposal of opioids and all medications.

The American Medical Association **Task Force to Reduce Opioid Abuse** 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 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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> from taking them. The CDC 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, DEA-authorized collection site or pharmacy, if the pharmacy has a secure drop-box program. Additional take back and disposal options and resources are below.

Learn more at [ama-assn.org/opioids-disposal](https://ama-assn.org/opioids-disposal)

1. ONDCP findings from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration’s NSDUH averaged for 2009 and 2010 show that 55 percent of persons who used pain relievers non-medically obtained the pain relievers from a friend or relative for free, another 11 percent bought them from a friend or relative, and 5 percent got them from a friend or relative without asking. <https://nsduhweb.rti.org/respweb/homepage.cfm>

2. The Safe Homes Coalition’s Keep Kids Safe Program is an example of a program that provides plastic bags to real estate professionals such as Realtors® so their clients can secure prescription medications while their home is being shown to potential buyers. <http://makeitasafehome.org>

**1 Talk to your patients!** More than 70 percent of people misusing opioid analgesics are getting them from family and friends—sharing opioids is illegal and may be deadly.

**2 Remind your patients!** Store medicines out of reach from children and never share prescription(s) with anyone.

**3 Urge your patients to safely dispose of expired, unwanted and unused medications!** Recommend patients use pharmacy and law enforcement “take back” resources whenever possible.

## Take back and disposal resources for physicians and patients

- **Search for a drug disposal location near you**  
<https://apps.dea.diversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main?execution=e1s1>
- **Find an authorized local collector**  
Contact the DEA Office of Diversion Control's Registration Call Center at (800) 882-9539
- **View the FDA guide "How to Dispose of Unused Medicines"**  
<https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm>
- **View the FDA "Disposal of Unused Medicines: What You Should Know" resource**  
<https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/BuyingUsingMedicineSafely/EnsuringSafeUseofMedicine/SafeDisposalofMedicines/ucm186187.htm>
- **View the California State Board of Pharmacy's quick reference resource**  
[http://pharmacy.ca.gov/publications/dont\\_flush\\_meds.pdf](http://pharmacy.ca.gov/publications/dont_flush_meds.pdf)

### AMA Task Force to Reduce Opioid Abuse organizations

American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine  
American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
American Academy of Pain Medicine  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation  
American Association of Neurological Surgeons and Congress of Neurological Surgeons  
American College of Emergency Physicians  
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine  
American College of Physicians  
American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Dental Association  
American Medical Association  
American Osteopathic Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Society of Addiction Medicine  
American Society of Anesthesiologists  
Arkansas Medical Society  
California Medical Association  
Massachusetts Medical Society  
Medical Society of the State of New York  
New Mexico Medical Society  
Ohio State Medical Association  
Oregon Medical Association  
Utah Medical Association