



The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, Arizona Affiliate

***Teen Abuse of Prescription & Over-The-Counter Medicine Now an Epidemic  
Good Medicine/Bad Behavior***

**Thousands of Arizona teenagers are intentionally abusing prescription medicines** (pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, sedatives, and over-the-counter cough medicines) to get high. According to the 2012 Arizona Youth Use Survey, **1 out of 4** 12<sup>th</sup> graders report abusing prescription medicines to get high, and **1 out of 5** 8<sup>th</sup> graders report abusing prescription medicine.

The high level of this behavior, called **pharming**, means it has become entrenched and **normalized**. There are two factors driving this epidemic:

**Ease of access through a medicine cabinet** at home or a friend's house, **and the internet**. **40% of teens mistakenly believe that intentionally abusing Rx medicines is much safer than using so-called "street drugs."**

We can stop the abuse of prescription medicine. Please take the next step and dispose of unused medicine and safeguard your medicine cabinet at home. Please ask your friends and family to do the same.

To learn more about prescription drug abuse please visit [DrugFreeAz.org/Rx](http://DrugFreeAz.org/Rx)

## How to Dispose of Unused Medicines

### ***Is your medicine cabinet filled with expired drugs or medications you no longer use? How should you dispose of them?***

Most drugs can be thrown in the household trash, but consumers should take certain precautions before tossing them out, according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). A growing number of community-based “take-back” programs offer another safe disposal alternative.

#### **Guidelines for Drug Disposal**

The FDA worked with the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to develop the first consumer guidance for proper disposal of prescription drugs. The federal guidelines are summarized here:

- Follow any specific disposal instructions on the drug label or patient information that accompanies the medication. Do not flush prescription drugs down the toilet.
- Take advantage of community drug take-back programs that allow the public to bring unused drugs to a central location for proper disposal. Call your city or county government’s household trash and recycling service to see if a take-back program is available in your community. The Drug Enforcement Administration, working with state and local law enforcement agencies, is sponsoring National Prescription Drug Take Back Days ([www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov](http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov)) throughout the United States.
- If no instructions are given on the drug label and no take-back program is available in your area, throw the drugs in the household trash, but first:

- **Take them out of their original containers and mix them with an undesirable substance, such as used coffee grounds or kitty litter. The medication will be less appealing to children and pets, and unrecognizable to people who may intentionally go through your trash.**
- **Put them in a sealable bag, empty can, or other container to prevent the medication from leaking or breaking out of a garbage bag.**

FDA’s Deputy Director of the Office of Compliance Lisa Bernstein, Pharm. D., J.D., offers some additional tips:

- Before throwing out a medicine container, scratch out all identifying information on the prescription label to make it unreadable. This will help protect your identity and the privacy of your personal health information.
- Do not give medications to friends. Doctors prescribe drugs based on a person’s specific symptoms and medical history. A drug that works for you could be dangerous for someone else.
- When in doubt about proper disposal, talk to your pharmacist.

Bernstein says the same disposal methods for prescription drugs could apply to over-the-counter drugs as well.

Adapted from Consumer Health Information [www.fda.gov/consumer](http://www.fda.gov/consumer)