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'Take-Back' Programs Can Keep Harmful Pharmaceuticals Out of Great Lakes, UB Expert Says

Monday, April 23, 2012 - 2:04 pm



EXPERT CONTACT :

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April 28 is National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day, which enables people to drop off unwanted medication at safe locations across the United States.

Every day, Domske says, people flush antibiotics, hormonal supplements and other drugs down the toilet without realizing that they're polluting waterways—including the Great Lakes. Take-back programs help keep our waters clean and prevent pharmaceuticals from falling into the wrong hands, Domske says.

National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day takes place from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Saturday, April 28. For a list of local drop-off sites, visit <http://bit.ly/JVtPXA>. The UB School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences is a partner in this effort.

Q&A WITH DOMSKE:

Q: What is the right way to dispose of pharmaceuticals?

A: The best way to dispose of unwanted or unused pharmaceuticals is to take them to a drug take-back program, like the one that UB's School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences will be assisting with, in conjunction with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Besides these drug take-back programs, some pharmacies will accept pharmaceuticals, so people should check with their pharmacists.

If someone cannot take their materials to return programs, they can mix the pharmaceuticals with something unattractive to people and pets, like used coffee grounds or kitty litter in a plastic bag. That bag should be taped shut and then placed in a non-recyclable plastic container, sealed with tape and placed in the garbage.

Q: Why is it harmful to the environment when people fail to follow proper procedures?

A: Many people flush unused or expired pharmaceuticals down the drain or toilet, thinking the material will get treated in wastewater treatment facilities. Unfortunately, most treatment plants were not designed to deal with pharmaceuticals. The substances pass through the treatment facilities and are released into local waterways, posing a threat for fish and other aquatic organisms. Researchers have found such pharmaceuticals as anti-depressants and anti-seizure medicines in the Great Lakes.

Q: Is improper disposal of pharmaceuticals a common problem?

A: It is a common and easily treated problem. People can have a positive impact on the health of our freshwater resources, like Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, by utilizing take-back programs, or at least disposing of unwanted or unused pharmaceuticals correctly. They should never flush them down the toilet or pour them down the drain!

Not only are unused, unwanted and expired pharmaceuticals an environmental concern when they are flushed or dumped, they also pose a human health threat when they get into the wrong hands. The use of drugs by teenagers and young people is on the rise and, unfortunately, many of them can find these substances right in their parents' and grandparents' medicine chests.

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