

On April 29, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) will team up with local law enforcement agencies across the country for National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day. The National Prescription Drug Take Back Day aims to provide a safe, convenient, and responsible means of disposing prescription drugs, while also educating the general public about the potential for abuse and medications.

Since starting the program in 2010, the DEA has taken in nearly 6 million pounds of unwanted, unneeded or expired medications. These medications may have otherwise lingered in medicine chests and kitchen cabinets or have been thrown down the drain. Last year's National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day event broke records by taking back 447 tons of unneeded medications.

According to the DEA, the majority of prescription drug abusers report in surveys that they get their drugs from friends and family. Cleaning out old prescription drugs from medicine cabinets, kitchen drawers, and bedside tables reduces accidents, thefts, and the misuse and abuse of these medicines, including the opioid painkillers.

"It's important to check your medicine cabinet periodically, especially because expired or unused prescriptions can pose a health risk for you or a loved one if ingested accidentally or misused," said Dr. Indra Cidambi, addiction medicine expert from the Center for Network Therapy. Dr. Cidambi shares three important reasons for individuals to participate in National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day:

- **Misuse/Abuse Could Lead to Addiction:** The program can help prevent the abuse of medications. According to NIDA (1), 70 percent of people who abused prescription medications obtained it (given free, bought or took) from a friend or relative. According to the DEA, 8 out of 10 new heroin users began their addiction to opiates by abusing legally prescribed pain medications. The growing epidemic of abuse/misuse of opioids and other medications such as benzodiazepines can lead to dependence or overdose.
- **Self-Medication Attempts Pose Health Hazards:** Storing medications that are no longer needed may lead to serious health problems, if teenagers or even young adults in their homes ingest them accidentally or use them in an attempt to self-medicate because of the misconception that it is safe to use as it was prescribed by a physician.
- **Reckless Disposal Harms the Environment:** When an individual tosses medications in the trash or down the drain, the medication can eventually seep into groundwater. A glaring example is in Africa -- a root used to treat pain by West African healers was found to have high levels of opiates. It was later discovered that people in the region used Tramadol (a synthetic opiate) heavily and human waste seeped into ground water and soil where the vegetation absorbed it!

"Check your medications for expiration dates, and properly dispose off unneeded medications," recommends Dr. Cidambi. "When in doubt, throw it out. Using expired medications can put individual's health at risk, as efficacy may decrease and medications may not perform as expected."