

Good Practice Guidance: Disposal of medicines in care homes and care homes with nursing

Introduction

Care homes must dispose of unwanted medicines safely and appropriately, to avoid placing people who use their services at risk.

Policies and Procedures

All care homes should have a written policy for the safe disposal of medication. This includes expired, damaged, unsuitable for intended use, no longer required/wanted or excess medicines. Consent should be obtained from the person, family member, carer or advocate as appropriate. The process for disposing of medicines should be documented in the medicines policy. National regulations and all legal requirements for disposal of waste must be met and are regulated by the Environment Agency.

You might need to dispose of medicines when:

- **a person's treatment changes or stops**
Safely dispose of remaining supplies (with the person's consent).
 - If you continue to administer the medicine, you will place the person at risk.
- **a person transfers to another care service**
The person should take all their medicines with them, unless they agree to dispose of any they no longer need.
 - If you do not dispose of that medicine, it could be administered in error to another person. You must not administer medication to a person if it was prescribed to another person.
- **a person dies**
You should keep the person's medicines until the coroner completes their investigations.
- **the medicine reaches its expiry date**
If you administer medicine beyond the expiry date, the product could have chemically changed. Refer to Good Practice Guidance 'Expiry dates for medication' for more information. Some medicines may expire before their 'use by' dates once the packaging has been opened. Other expiry dates may be shortened when products are removed from controlled temperature storage.

Disposing of medicines

Store medicines for disposal securely and safely in a tamper-proof container until collected or taken to the pharmacy. Disposal of medicines on site through the sewage system is not appropriate.

Care homes WITHOUT nursing	Care homes WITH nursing
Return medicines for disposal to the supplier (usually a community pharmacy or dispensing doctor)	Return medicines for disposal to a licensed waste disposal company; this might include community pharmacies
Return medicines for disposal to the supplier (usually a community pharmacy or dispensing doctor)	Return medicines for disposal to a licensed waste disposal company; this might include community pharmacies
Supplier disposes of medicines in line with current waste regulations	
Keep records of all appropriate information (see <i>below and Appendix 1</i>)	Keep records of all appropriate information (see <i>below and Appendix 2</i>)

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Good Practice Guidance documents are believed to accurately reflect the literature at the time of writing.

Disposing of medications in a Multi-Compartment Compliance Aid (MCCA)

Care homes WITHOUT nursing	Care homes WITH nursing
If the MCCA looks as if it is reusable every effort should be made to return it (via family if involved in the resident's care) to the supplying pharmacy or another part of the chain	If the MCCA looks as if it is reusable every effort should be made to return it (via family if involved in the resident's care) to the supplying pharmacy or another part of the chain
Medications should be removed from the MCCA	MCCA (or its inner container) with any remaining medication should be placed into the medicines for disposal container for return to a licensed waste disposal company; this might include community pharmacies
Labels that identify the resident should be removed	Labels do not need to be removed unless on the outer container/packaging
Empty packaging should be disposed of in the domestic waste	Outer empty packaging (labels removed) should be disposed of in the domestic waste
Supplier disposes of medicines in line with current waste regulations	Licensed waste contractor disposes of medicines
Keep records of all appropriate information (see <i>below and Appendix 1</i>)	Keep records of all appropriate information (see <i>below and Appendix 2</i>)

Disposing of controlled drugs (CDs)

Refer to Good Practice Guidance Controlled drugs, Appendix 1: Controlled Drugs: Receipt, administration, and disposal in care homes

Record Keeping

You must keep records to ensure that medicines are handled properly during disposal. Records could include:

- date of disposal or return to pharmacy
- name and strength of medicine
- quantity removed
- person for whom medicines were prescribed or purchased
- signature of the member of staff who arranges disposal of the medicines
- signature of the person collecting the medicines for disposal

Refer to Appendix 1 (care home without nursing) or Appendix 2 (care home with nursing) for examples of a Record of Medication disposal/ returns record template for care homes.

Nursing homes should also keep records of transactions with registered waste disposal companies.

Disposal records are treated as part of a person's care record; records must be kept in accordance with the required retention period.

References:

- CQC: Disposing of medicines
- [Disposing of medicines | Care Quality Commission \(cqc.org.uk\)](https://www.cqc.org.uk)
- NICE SC1 Managing medicines in care homes
[Overview | Managing medicines in care homes | Guidance | NICE](#)
- NICE guideline 67: Managing medicines for adults receiving social care in the community
[Overview | Managing medicines for adults receiving social care in the community | Guidance | NICE](#)
- PSNC
[Disposal of unwanted medicines: PSNC Main site](#)
- RPS Professional guidance on the safe and secure handling of medicines: Removal and disposal of surplus and waste medicines
[Professional guidance on the safe and secure handling of medicines \(rpharms.com\)](https://www.rpharms.com)
- SPS Principles on the Disposal of Waste Pharmaceuticals used within Community Health Services
[Principles on the Disposal of Waste Pharmaceuticals used within Community Health Services – SPS - Specialist Pharmacy Service – The first stop for professional medicines advice](#)

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