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Safe medication return program gets underway

OLYMPIA -- Today is the go-live date for Washington's [Safe Medication Return Program](#), a pioneering effort aimed at reducing medication misuse, abuse, and poisonings.

This program creates a unified, statewide, medication return program that will give Washington residents free, convenient, and environmentally responsible options for disposing of unwanted medication. Physical drop boxes [are available](#). People may also request free mail-back envelopes so they don't need to leave their homes to participate.

People may return most medications. That includes over-the-counter and prescription medications, controlled substance medication, and even household pet medications. Unused and unneeded medications in a household pose a potential risk for poisoning and overdose deaths. Improperly discarded medication also presents an environmental hazard. Flushing medicine down the toilet or throwing it in the trash pollutes water and soil.

Washington is the first state to implement such a program as a result of state law. Funded by drug manufacturers at no cost to taxpayers, the program encourages people to return unwanted and expired medications.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration says about 50 percent of people who misuse prescription medications get the drugs from friends or family members. Many people who become addicted to heroin and other illicit drugs first abuse prescription medications found in the home. Poisonings often occur among young children who take medication not intended for them.

MED-Project is the approved program operator, under the Department of Health's oversight.

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