

Answers to questions about...

Pharmaceuticals

The Orange County Sanitation District (OC San) is a public agency that provides wastewater collection, treatment, and recycling services for approximately 2.6 million people in central and northwest Orange County. OC San has two plants that treat wastewater from residential, commercial and industrial sources.

What are pharmaceuticals?

Pharmaceuticals are medications obtained as ordered by a doctor (“prescribed”) or purchased over-the-counter without a doctor’s prescription.

What effects can flushing pharmaceuticals cause?

1. Studies show that hormones found in pharmaceuticals may cause abnormalities in the reproductive cycles of fish. Despite this, fish surveys conducted by OC San’s Ocean Monitoring Program consistently show that bottom-dwelling fish communities off the coast of Huntington Beach and in the vicinity of OC San’s ocean outfall are healthy and are no different from those living in similar parts of the ocean.
2. Disposing of pharmaceuticals to the sewer can lead to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Thus, the standard medications used to treat infections become ineffective against the bacteria.

In the past, people have been instructed to flush medication down the toilet to prevent harm to children and animals. However, we now know that flushing pharmaceuticals can have adverse effects on the environment. **Flushing is no longer the recommended disposal method.** “Environmental Protection Agency strongly recommends against sewerage any pharmaceuticals” (Federal Register, Vol. 84, No. 36, February 22, 2019).

How to dispose of unwanted medication

1. Take them to a collection event, such as the National Prescription Drug Take Back Day. For information, see <https://takebackday.dea.gov>.
2. Take the medication back to the pharmacy you obtained it from if it has a take-back program.

3. Dispose of unused or unwanted medications in the trash safely but **ONLY** if the other two options (drug take back collection events or pharmacy take-back programs) are **NOT** readily available.

How to safely dispose of medications in the trash:

Destroy the capsules by crushing, breaking and wetting. Place the remains in the original childproof container, seal with tape, and toss in the trash.

Are there any locations that take pharmaceuticals?

Currently, certain pharmacies have take-back bins where people can dispose of unwanted medications (some restrictions apply). Orange County Waste & Recycling’s website contains a list of such facilities (www.oilandfills.com/hazardous/disposal). Note: With the passage of SB 212 in 2018, CalRecycle is working on regulations to require the development of stewardship management plans that will ultimately provide people more options for disposing their unwanted medications. Therefore, the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Centers do not accept unwanted medications anymore. To find out about other waste these centers accept, visit Orange County Waste and Recycling’s website at www.oilandfills.com, or call **714.834.4000**.

How can I remember what is allowed down the drain?

Follow the 3 Ps rule, only pee, poop, and (toilet) paper should be put into the sewer system, everything else belongs in the trash. Please visit www.ocsan.gov for more information.

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