
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 28, 2013

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The Kent County Health Department Launches Toolkit, Video for Medicine Disposal

GRAND RAPIDS – The Kent County Health Department, in partnership with the Department of Public Works, has recently created a video and toolkit to teach residents about what to do with unwanted or expired medications. Improperly disposing of unwanted medications by flushing them down the toilet or throwing them in the trash creates a number of hazards for public health and for waste management, including:

- Medications that end up in landfills eventually seep into the area ground water. Those flushed down the toilet pass through the sewage treatment plants and then are released into the waterways.
- Prescription drug abuse is a growing problem particularly with teens and young adults. The medications are legal and easy to get. They often come from home or the home of a relative or friend. Many who misuse these drugs mistakenly believe they are safer than illegal drugs.
- Medications thrown in the trash can be stolen and used possibly causing illness or death. Children and pets could find them which could lead to unintentional poisonings. Medicines thrown away with personal information on the labels could result in identity theft.

“The health department receives calls from people who don’t know what to do with these expired or unneeded medications,” said Adam London, Health Officer for the Kent County Health Department. “This partnership has empowered these two departments to address an issue of mutual concern by leveraging resources: the health department’s strengths in educating the public about health and environmental issues, and the DPW’s expertise in protecting residents and the environment through sensible waste management.”

An estimated twenty to sixty percent of prescription medications go unused. Putting unwanted or expired medicine in the trash leaves it vulnerable to being stolen and used, potentially resulting in illness or death. Throwing unused medication in the trash sends it to the local landfill, where it may seep into the surrounding water table. Flushing unused medications down the toilet sends these chemicals to sewage treatment plants, which don’t screen for them. These chemicals often end up in rivers and streams, eventually making their way into Lake Michigan.

The page is now available at <http://www.accesskent.com/Health/wmtbm.htm>. Funding to create the toolkit was provided by the 2012 Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Community Pollution Prevention Grant Program.

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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