

Media Release

Drop-off your drugs safely and help combat the epidemic of opioid abuse

May 20, 2016 – Residents of the Capital Region District are encouraged to safely dispose of their medications to ensure they don't get into the wrong hands or pollute the environment.

Given the recent news that BC will likely have a record number of drug overdoses this year, the safe disposal of medication is especially critical. Prescription drugs can be effective in helping people to manage pain and other conditions, but if used inappropriately they can have deadly consequences.

BC residents can return unused or expired medications to community pharmacies across the province at any time of the year at no charge. This Saturday, May 21 also marks National Prescription Drug Drop-Off Day, a Canada-wide initiative led by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

The BC Medications Return Program ensures medications aren't thrown in the garbage, where they could be found by young people or pets, or flushed down the toilet, where they can harm the marine environment.

In 2015, residents in the Capital Regional District (which covers the southern tip of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands) returned more than 11,000 kilograms of expired or unused medications to community pharmacies for safe disposal. This is more than a 61 per cent increase in the number of medications returned in 2009, in the early days of the awareness campaign.

"There are 49 community pharmacies in Central Okanagan that will accept medication returns at any time," says Geraldine Vance, CEO of the BC Pharmacy Association. "Your pharmacist is the best person to help you dispose of unwanted drugs."

To encourage the public to heed this message, the BCPhA and Health Products Stewardship Association have produced a new video on the theme of Fish Can't Say No to Drugs, which can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/Qakaycalh1U>.

Medication should be stored out of reach of children or in a locked cabinet. According to the 2010–11 Youth Smoking Survey, 8.2% of Canadian youth in grades 6–12 reported using prescription and over-the-counter drugs in a 12-month period to get high.

"In our region, proper medication disposal and pollution prevention are essential to protecting our marine environment, regardless of the level of wastewater treatment," says Vic Derman, Chair of the CRD Environmental Services Committee. "In addition to working with industry to ensure best practices, partnering with groups like the BCPhA helps us raise awareness and educate residents on the importance of proper disposal and unused medication."

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The Medications Return Program covers all prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, including topical antibiotic and antifungal creams, and natural health products that are orally ingested such as vitamins, minerals, traditional Chinese medicines, herbal products, probiotics, and homeopathic medicines. More than 95 per cent of community pharmacies in BC participate in the program, which is free for all British Columbians.

Any liquid or cream medications should be kept in their original container with any personal information removed or blacked out, and solid medications like pills should be combined into a small bag. For more information, visit www.healthsteward.ca.

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The BCPhA is a not-for-profit, voluntary association, representing more 3,000 pharmacists and more than 850 pharmacies throughout British Columbia.

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