

Adult Care Home Program Newsletter

October 2026

Let's Talk About Medication Disposal

In adult care homes the rules and regulations for administering, documenting, storing and disposing of medications are very specific. This can be a challenge for some care homes.

What qualifies as a medication?

By Oregon law, the definition of “medication” is broad. Anything that goes into or onto a resident’s body for a therapeutic purpose is considered a medication. This includes:

- Medication prescribed by a healthcare provider
- Over-the-counter medicine
- Gels and creams applied to the skin
- Vitamins and supplements
- Home remedies

All of these products require appropriate and timely disposal strategies and documentation.

When do I need to dispose of medications?

Medication must be disposed of within 10 days of becoming outdated, discontinued, unused, recalled or contaminated. (MCAR 023-080-585)

Outdated: Medications prescribed by a doctor often have two dates: the pharmacy’s expiration date and the manufacturer’s expiration date listed on the package.

Medications past the **pharmacy’s expiration date** are considered outdated.

The manufacturer’s date shows how long a medication can be stored before it is opened. Opening a medication’s package can affect its potency. For this reason, care homes are

required to use the pharmacy expiration date to determine if a medication is outdated.

For over-the-counter medication that has no prescription expiration date, use the manufacturer’s expiration date.

Discontinued: A healthcare provider may stop a medication or adjust the dosage (for example, changing from 5 mg to 10 mg). Medication leftover after a prescription has been stopped or changed is considered “discontinued.”

Unused: When you receive a prescription refill, all leftover medication from the previous refill is now considered unused. This is true even if the previous refill hasn’t expired yet. This applies to both medications taken routinely and PRN medications.

Recalled: Drug companies remove defective medications from the market to protect consumers by issuing a “recall.” You may receive an alert from the pharmacy about a prescribed medication that has been recalled.

The US Food and Drug Administration provides a list of recalled prescribed and over-the-counter medications at [Drug Recalls, link.multco.us/fda.recalls](https://link.multco.us/fda.recalls).

Contaminated: Medications can become contaminated in several ways. For example:

- Foreign objects or debris in the container
- Mixing with other meds or substances
- Bacteria, mold or fungus growth
- Exposure to light, heat or moisture

Any pill, liquid, cream or drop that appears discolored, cloudy, broken, or that has been exposed to unsterile conditions (for example, dropped on the floor) are contaminated.

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You have 10 days to dispose of contaminated medication. However, because it poses a high risk, it should be removed from the resident's medication storage and disposed of ASAP.

How should medications be disposed of?

Some disposal methods are better than others. If disposal instructions were included with the medication, always follow those instructions. Otherwise, use the following methods.

Medicine take-back options: The best and safest way to dispose of medications is through drug take-back programs. This can be done through the mail or in person. In Google Maps search for "drug disposal" to find a local business registered in the program.

You can mail back medications for free through [Oregon's MED-Project](https://link.multco.us/MED.project), link.multco.us/MED.project. Many local pharmacies have mail-back options as well.

Drug deactivation disposal bags: Detera is a medication disposal pouch that works for a variety of medications. Put your medications in the pouch, add water, seal it up and trash it.

You can request Detera bags from the Multnomah County Health Department by emailing hope@multco.us or visit [Safe Med Disposal](https://link.multco.us/safe-meds), link.multco.us/safe-meds.

Flushing down the toilet: You should only flush medications if they are listed on the [FDA's Flush List](https://link.multco.us/FDA.flush), link.multco.us/FDA.flush.

Dispose of medications in the trash:

1. Remove medications from their original containers.
2. Mix liquid or pills with an unappealing substance like dirt, cat litter or used coffee grounds (do not crush pills or capsules).
3. Place the mixture in a sealed plastic bag.
4. Throw it away in your trash at home.
5. Scratch out all personal information on the prescription label of empty medication bottles or packaging, then trash or recycle.

What about medical sharps?

Medical sharps are needles, lancets and other sharp instruments or devices used during medical procedures or medication administration. This includes glass tubing that could be broken if placed directly in the trash.

Used medical sharps must be placed immediately in approved red puncture-resistant containers for disposal. Once it is full, the whole container must be properly disposed of within 10 days. (MCAR 023-100-250)

There are a few options for disposal. Order a USPS sharps medical container mail-back kit. Check to see if you can add a sharps disposal to your garbage service.

You can also make an appointment with Metro to drop off your container and receive a new empty one, [Very Small Quantity Generator](https://oregonmetro.gov/very-small-quantity-generator), oregonmetro.gov/very-small-quantity-generator.

Don't forget to document the disposal!

Medication disposal can be documented on the MAR or anywhere within the resident record.

Documentation must include the date, resident's name, name and dosage of the medication, number of pills or amount of medication disposed of, reason for disposal, method of disposal, and the dated signature of the provider who disposed of the medication.

If the medication is a controlled substance found in schedules II through V, a second provider must witness the disposal. (You can't be your own witness.) The witness needs to sign and date the disposal documentation. (MCAR 023-080-589)

Use the optional Medication Disposal Record form to easily capture all this information. Find the form at [Record Keeping Forms](https://multco.us/info/record-keeping-forms) multco.us/info/record-keeping-forms.

Training and Support

*Sessions are online unless listed as in person.
To register call 503-988-3000 or email
advsd.adult.carehomeprogram@multco.us.*

Orientation

Required for operator, resident manager and shift manager applicants.

Tuesday, October 6

Time: 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. (Sign on 8:50 a.m.)

\$55

Free Info Session for Operator Applicants

Tuesday, October 20

9 – 11 a.m. (Sign on 8:50 a.m.)

First-year required trainings for operators, resident managers and shift managers:

In-Person Record Keeping Part B, Medication Management

Thursday, October 8, 10 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

East County Library, Room 2H,
475 NW Division Street, Gresham, OR 97030

Cost: \$30 | 3 CEUs

Honoring Diversity

Tuesday, October 13

9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (Sign on 8:50 a.m.)

\$30 | 3 CEUs

In-Person Emergency Preparedness Planning

Thursday, October 15, 10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

East County Library, Room 2H,
475 NW Division Street, Gresham, OR 97030

\$30 | 3 CEUs

In-Person Record Keeping Part A, Screening and Care Planning

Monday, November 9, 9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Sharron Kelley A, 600 NE 8th St., Gresham
\$30 | 3 CEUs

In-Person Provider Meeting TBD

Register Now for the Oregon Gerontological Conference

The theme of this year's conference is: justice in an aging society: people, power and possibilities. The conference features experts in the field of aging, including national and regional scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and business and community leaders. Each session will engage in thought-provoking discussions, share bold ideas, and explore practical solutions.

You can sign up for the entire conference series or for individual sessions. Each session is from 9:30 a.m. – noon.

October 9: Legal Rights Under Threat: Aging, Immigration and Justice

October 16: Aging with Pride: Equity, Belonging and Justice Across Intersecting Identities

October 23: Aging, Risk and Resilience: Emergency Preparedness and Environmental Justice

October 30: Respecting Choice: Autonomy, Dignity and Justice in Later Life

Earn two CEUs per session. For more information and to register, visit [Oregon Gerontological Association](https://oregongerontologicalassociation.org), oregongero.org.

Multnomah County Website Now Available in Vietnamese

To automatically translate the Multnomah County website into Vietnamese, click the button in the top right hand corner of the website.

The translation feature applies to all website text, but does not translate PDFs.

The website is also available in Spanish.