

Use and disposal of drugs and poisons after a disaster

In the wake of widespread devastation caused by storms, floods or cyclones, drugs and poisons (including medicines) may be damaged or unsafe to use.



(including the package and label) has not been affected. Any affected drugs and poisons should be disposed of.

Disposal of drugs and poisons

Due to potential safety issues (such as broken glass or a leaking container), drugs and poisons should be securely wrapped or double wrapped to ensure they do not come apart or leak during disposal and that they cannot be identified as drugs or poisons. Once appropriately wrapped, the drugs or poisons can be disposed of with general waste (unless otherwise specified in this fact sheet).

If a poison container is damaged, the contents should be disposed of in accordance with the requirements of the local government in your area.

Sharps, such as needles, should be placed in rigid, puncture-resistant containers and disposed of with general waste (unless otherwise specified in this fact sheet).

Some community pharmacies are involved in the Return of Unwanted Medicine (RUM) program, in which individuals can return expired or unwanted medicines to a pharmacy. Check with your local pharmacy before taking drugs there. For further information visit www.returnmed.com.au/

In a disaster or emergency situation, Queensland Health environmental health officers are authorised to destroy a drug or poison if necessary.

Identifying affected drugs and poisons

Drugs and poisons may be unsafe or unsuitable as a result of:

- contact with contaminated floodwater
- damage to the packaging or the drug/poison from an impact e.g. part of label missing, illegible label, broken or punctured container, perforated blister strip
- exposure to temperatures, light or humidity outside the guidelines on the manufacturer's label, caused by damaged, insufficient or inadequate storage, including when power is temporarily unavailable.

Salvaging of drugs and poisons

Avoid any unnecessary, direct contact with damaged or unsafe drugs and poisons. Salvaging of drugs and poisons is not recommended unless it is certain that the drug or poison

Further advice for health practitioners and businesses regarding disposal

Controlled (Schedule 8) drugs such as morphine and pethidine, with legislated secure storage and recording requirements, must be disposed of using Queensland Health's existing procedure for the destruction of controlled drugs. These drugs should be forwarded to Queensland Health Forensic and Scientific Services. For further information about the destruction of controlled drugs and poisons visit www.health.qld.gov.au/health_professionals/medicines/.

Restricted (Schedule 4) drugs (including vaccines) and poisons should be disposed of via existing commercial disposal arrangements.

Needles, sharps and liquid cytotoxic products should be placed in designated sharps or waste containers specifically designed for such waste and disposed of via existing commercial disposal arrangements. Health practitioners or businesses unable to comply with this advice should contact Queensland Health on 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

Other health related issues

Where water is required for ingestion, dilution or reconstitution of drugs and poisons, access to and use of safe drinking water is crucial. For further information on ensuring safe drinking water visit www.health.qld.gov.au/healthieryou/disaster/.

Where drugs and poisons are required to be taken with or following food, access to and use of safe food is crucial. For further information on food safety in an emergency visit www.health.qld.gov.au/healthieryou/disaster/.



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Further information:

This fact sheet can be accessed online at www.health.qld.gov.au/healthieryou/disaster along with other fact sheets:

- Accessing Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS) subsidised medicines

Emergency Management Queensland provides information on how to prepare for a cyclone, storm, flood and/or tsunami. Visit www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp

The Australian Government provides the key online access point for emergency management information and community awareness publications. Visit www.em.gov.au

For further information, contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit:

Brisbane North	Tel: 3624 1111	Darling Downs	Tel: 4631 9888	Mount Isa and Gulf	Tel: 4744 9100
Brisbane South	Tel: 3000 9148	Gold Coast	Tel: 5668 3700	South West	Tel: 4656 8100
Bundaberg	Tel: 4150 2780	Hervey Bay	Tel: 4184 1800	Sunshine Coast	Tel: 5409 6600
Cairns	Tel: 4226 5555	Logan	Tel: 3412 2989	Townsville	Tel: 4753 9000
Central Queensland	Tel: 4920 6989	Mackay	Tel: 4911 0400	West Moreton	Tel: 3413 1200
Central West	Tel: 4652 6000	Moreton Bay	Tel: 3142 1800		