

Use and disposal of medicines after a disaster

Fact sheet

In the wake of widespread devastation caused by storms, floods or cyclones, medicines and poisons may be damaged or unsafe.

Identifying affected medicines and poisons

Medicines and poisons may be unsafe as a result of

- contact with contaminated floodwater
- damage to the packaging or the medicine/poison from an impact, for example part of label missing, illegible label, broken or punctured container, or 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 medicines and poisons

Avoid any unnecessary, direct contact with damaged or unsafe medicines and poisons. Salvaging of medicines and poisons is not recommended unless you are certain (including the package and label) it has not been affected. Any affected medicines and poisons should be disposed of.

Disposal of medicines and poisons

Due to potential safety issues (such as broken glass or a leaking container), medicines 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 medicines or poisons. Once appropriately wrapped, they 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 council 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 medicines there.

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



Figure 1 Stack of tablets in foil wrapping

Further advice for health practitioners and businesses regarding disposal

Controlled (Schedule 8) medicines with legislated secure storage and recording requirements, such as morphine and pethidine, must be disposed of using Department of Health's existing procedure for the destruction of controlled medicines. These medicines should be forwarded to Department of Health Forensic and Scientific Services.

Restricted (Schedule 4) medicines (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 Department of Health on 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

Other health related issues

Where water is required for ingestion, dilution or reconstitution of medicines and poisons, access to and use of safe drinking water is crucial.

Where medicines and poisons are required to be taken with or following food, access to and use of safe food is crucial.

If you have any concerns about the safety of your medicines discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist or contact 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

Further information

- Department of Health (for information on ensuring safe drinking water and food safety in an emergency) <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/disaster>
- Contact your doctor, pharmacist, hospital or health clinic
- Options for disposal of regulated poisons can be found at <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/licences/medicines-poisons/poisons-management>
- Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) at any time
- Contact 13 QGOV (13 74 68) for your nearest public health unit.

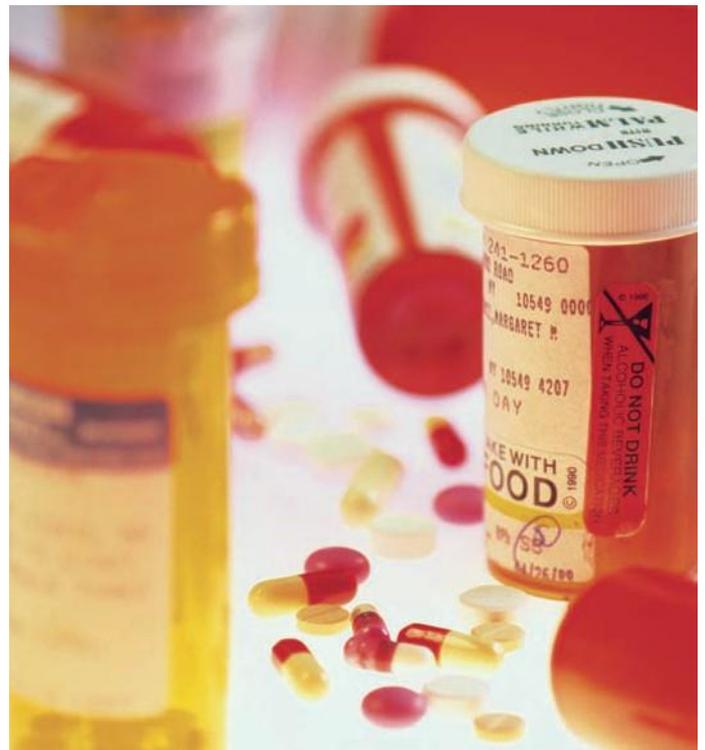


Figure 2 Tablet bottles