

Return Unwanted Medicines (The RUM Project)

What is Return Unwanted Medicines?

Return Unwanted Medicines (or The RUM Project) is a national, not-for-profit company that provides consumers with a free and convenient way to safely dispose of expired and unwanted medicines. Anyone can return their household medicines to any community pharmacy. The returned medicines are put in a secure bin and then collected and disposed of by high temperature incineration in accordance with regulatory and EPA requirements.

What types of medicines can be returned to pharmacy?

Prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, herbal or complementary supplements, gels, liquids, creams and veterinary medicines can be returned to community pharmacy to be disposed of in the RUM bin.

Empty inhalers are safely disposed of in your normal rubbish collection but any inhaler that still contains some of the active ingredient, should be taken to the pharmacy to be put in the RUM bin.

Sharps or needles cannot be put in RUM bins. Please talk to your pharmacist about the appropriate way to dispose of these items.

What is the disposal process?

Returned medicines are disposed of by high temperature incineration. The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) has approved this process. Last year, RUM collected and safely disposed of over 700 tonnes of medicines, potentially preventing them ending up in waterways and landfill.

Why is it necessary to collect and safely dispose of expired and unwanted medicines?

Evidence over many years confirms that medicines stored in the home can be the source of accidental poisonings of children or pets, and the source of confusion with elderly people. The National Poisons Information Centres report that over 5,000 children end up in hospital due to accidental medicine poisonings each year.

Elderly people who take multiple medicines for multiple conditions can sometimes become confused as to what to take, and the risk of mix-ups increases if medicines that are no longer needed or expired are not discarded.

Additionally, medicines and chemicals in general can contaminate the environment when discarded via landfill sites and sewerage facilities. A recent Griffith University study of over 4,300 Australians* found more than 80% of people are completely unaware of the RUM Project and do not know how to dispose of unwanted medicines safely and appropriately.

“Last year alone, over 700 tonnes of medicines were collected and safely disposed of by the RUM Project, preventing it from ending up in waterways or landfill. If that’s only medicines collected from around 20% of the population, imagine how many more are hiding in bathroom cabinets and kitchen drawers across the country,” said Toni Riley, Project Manager, RUM, and community pharmacist.

The Griffith University study also revealed that most respondents (67%) said they disposed of unwanted medicines with the usual household garbage; followed by being poured down the drain or toilet (23.3%) and less than a quarter (23%) actually disposed of their medication by returning it to a pharmacy.

“By following three simple steps of READ, REMOVE & RETURN, Australians can minimise the risk of unintended poisonings and medication mix-ups, and do their bit to protect the environment,” continued Ms Riley.

Return Unwanted Medicines is urging Australians to follow 3 simple steps to a safer home and cleaner environment:

READ

Go to your home medicine area. **READ** the labels of medicines, check the expiry dates and consider whether the medication is needed.

REMOVE

REMOVE all expired and unwanted medicines and place them in a container or bag.

For more

RETURN

RETURN all expired and unwanted medicine to your local pharmacy. Your pharmacist will put your medicines in a secure bin for safe disposal.

information on Return Unwanted Medicines, visit returnmed.com.au or talk to your local pharmacist.

*The National Return and Disposal of Unwanted Medicines (NatRUM) Project Audit 2016 was conducted by Griffith University and funded by RUM and Australian Government Department of Health. The research consisted of two stages, and was conducted from June to October 2016. The first stage involved an audit of a sample of returned medicines containers from all Australian states and territories. In total, representative samples of 423 Return of Unwanted Medicines (RUM) bins from all Australian states / territories. The second stage involved a two-step general population audit that consisted of a survey to assess awareness of the NatRUM scheme, and the risks associated with the improper disposal of unwanted medicines and accumulation of medicines, and structured interviews with higher medication users to identify perceptions and behaviours surrounding the disposal of unwanted medicines. There were 4302 adults from the Australian general population (including a sub-sample of 166 interview participants who were higher medication users) who participated in the research.
