

Assessment of safe storage and disposal of medicines during a telehealth medication review consultation

This resource highlights key areas for consideration when conducting a Home Medicines Review (HMR) outside of a person's home. This should be read in conjunction with the PSA's Guidelines for comprehensive medication management reviews which describe best practice for the delivery of medication management services.

Patients using medicines in the community should be encouraged to store their medicines in a manner that maintains the quality of the medicine and safeguards the patient, their family and visitors in their home. Patients who need help managing their medicines might also need help in storing them safely. Storage of excessive, expired and unwanted medicines in the home can be dangerous and unsafe disposal of unwanted medicines can lead to environmental damage.

Some advisory statements that pharmacists can use with patients in emphasising the safe storage of medicines are shown below: (from resource 1)

- All medicines have the potential to be dangerous regardless of whether they are purchased at the supermarket, over-the-counter (OTC) at a pharmacy or obtained by prescription.
- Some vitamins can also be dangerous, particularly when taken in combination with certain prescription or OTC medicines.
- Medicines for people and veterinary medicine contain some of the strongest chemicals, as only a very small amount is needed to produce an effect.

- Household poisonings of children are common. Some medicines that are safe for adults, such as iron supplements, are highly poisonous to children. Liquid paracetamol is also a common cause of poisoning in children. Some of these products can also be dangerous to adults if taken in larger quantities than prescribed.
- Older people often become more sensitive to medicines and should be careful to take only medicine that is prescribed for them, and only the correct amount.
- The more medicines a person takes, the more important it becomes to dispose of superseded and expired medicines thoughtfully to avoid confusion or potential harm.
- Some older people tend to store medicines and may have a variety of medicines at home that are potentially very dangerous to young children. It is important to securely store any medications away from children.

There is a free and convenient way to dispose of your unwanted medicines responsibly via your local pharmacy, and it's called Return Unwanted Medicines (or The RUM Project).

The following process is recommended at <https://returnmed.com.au/>

More information and answers to frequently asked questions about the safe disposal of unwanted and expired medicines can be found at <https://returnmed.com.au/faqs/>

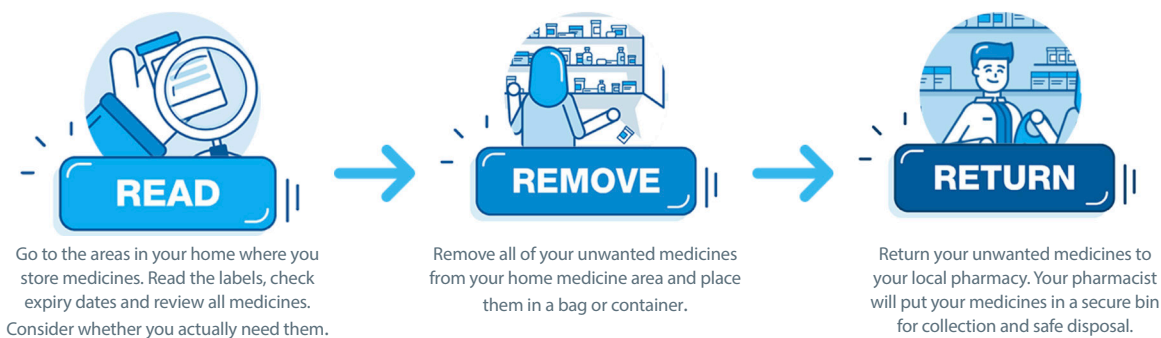


Figure 1: Process for Reviewing, Removing and Returning Unwanted Medicines (<https://returnmed.com.au/>)

Resources 1. Return Unwanted Medicines <https://returnmed.com.au/>

Suggested process during telehealth medication review consultation

- Advise patients that it is important to store medicines properly and in accordance with any instructions on the medicine label.
- Ask how and where they store their medicines and request a visual check (where possible):
 - Generally, medicines should be stored in their original container in a cool, dry and secure place. The stability/effectiveness of some medicines depends on storing them at the correct temperature, for example, those medicines requiring refrigeration.
 - Particular care must be taken to ensure that sharp objects such as syringes are stored safely.
- Ask the patient to check each of their medications for expiry and whether they are still regularly using them. Any medications that are expired and/or not being regularly used should be considered for return (see below).
- If the storage arrangement is not appropriate, provide advice on appropriate storage:
 - Avoiding the commonly used places subject to heat and humidity such as the bathroom medicine cabinet or the kitchen cupboard, above or next to the cooktop or fridge.
 - Medicines are best stored in dry, cool spaces away from light, and of course out of reach of children and pets.
 - Some medicines require refrigeration, patients should check storage requirements on labels of products.
- If unused or unwanted medicines are identified, encourage patients to contact their community pharmacy for free, safe disposal to be arranged. The pharmacy may arrange a time to pick up the medication from you without entering your home:
 - Most medicines can be returned to any pharmacy. It doesn't need to be the pharmacy that the medicine was originally obtained from. This applies to prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, herbal or complementary supplements, gels, liquids, creams and pet medicines (see Resource 1)
 - Opioids (strong pain relievers) may need to be separately stored or processed by the pharmacy. In this case, ensure the patient informs the pharmacy they are returning the medicine to knows this type of medicine is being returned (see Resource 2)
- If other medication management issues are identified (such as stockpiling or high potential for misuse), then advise on practical aids for assistance with medicine management:
 - A variety of medicine organisers and dose administration aids services are available at pharmacies (see resource 3). Patients should be encouraged to contact their pharmacy to discuss options for medicine management and how this can be arranged and delivered to their homes.

Resources

1. Return Unwanted Medicines <https://returnmed.com.au/>
2. Returning unused opioids <https://www.tga.gov.au/publication/return-your-unused-opioids-resource-kit>
3. Practical Aids to Manage Medicines <https://www.nps.org.au/consumers/managing-your-medicines#practical-aids-to-manage-your-medicines>
4. Guiding Principles for Medication Management In the Community <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/nmp-guide-medmgt-jul06-contents~nmp-guide-medmgt-jul06-guidepr8>
5. Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Guidelines for comprehensive medication management reviews (2019)