



GUIDE FOR CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

PROPER DISPOSAL OF PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE



SAVE THE EARTH,
DISPOSE PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE SMARTLY



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GUIDE FOR CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Project PharmWaste

This guide for citizens of the Republic of Serbia was created within the project 2025-1-RS01-KA210-ADU-000363956 — Save the Earth—dispose pharmaceutical waste smartly, which represents the Erasmus+ initiative in the field of adult education, realized within the program of small partnerships.

The project has been approved for financing by the European Union and is being implemented in the period from November 1, 2025 to April 30, 2027. It was developed in response to the growing environmental challenges and public health risks associated with improper disposal of pharmaceutical waste, with a focus on improving knowledge, skills and practices in local communities through education and collaboration.

The project is implemented through the partnership of pharmaceutical associations from Serbia and Croatia – the Association of Pharmacists of the Nišava Pirot Region and the Association for the Promotion of the Development of Pharmacists and a Healthy Life, Progressus.

The project manager is Prof. Dr. Aleksandra Catić Đorđević; the local coordinator for the Republic of Serbia is Asst. Dr. Aleksandar Jovanović, while the local coordinator for the Republic of Croatia is Univ. M.Sc. pharm. Ingrid Kummer.

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Introduction

Every medicine we use has its own purpose – to help us get better, relieve ailments, prevent disease and prevent disease and improve our quality of life. However, when medicines become redundant, when they expire or when we no longer need them, our responsibility does not end. This is when the concern for their proper disposal begins.

Active substances from improperly disposed medicines can reach water, soil and other components of the environment and have a long-term effect on the health of people, animals and ecosystems. What we don't see today may have consequences tomorrow. Small everyday decisions, like where to dispose of unused and expired medicine, have a bigger impact than we think – on nature, the quality of water and the safety of the food we consume.

At the same time, unused and expired medicines in the household can pose a risk to us as well – due to possible improper use, substitution or accidental ingestion. That is why the responsible handling of medicines is not only a question of environmental protection, but also a question of personal safety and health.

That is why it is important to act responsibly – simply, but correctly. By returning medicines to pharmacies or depositing them in designated places, each of us can be part of the solution. It doesn't take much – it's enough to make the right choice. The PharmWaste project invites you to make a change together: to reduce health risks, protect the environment and contribute to a healthier future.

Your choice makes a difference – today, tomorrow and for generations to come. Medicines are beneficial when used correctly, but improper disposal can pose risks to human health and the environment.

What is pharmaceutical waste?

Pharmaceutical waste includes all medicines that we no longer use - medicines that have expired, that are left after treatment, that are damaged, or that are no longer suitable for use for any reason.

Pharmaceutical waste: Key facts and figures

Amount of medicines in the household that are never used.

30–50 %

The quantity of medicines disposed of improperly.

66,9 %

Proportion of patients who discontinue therapy prematurely.

76 %

Wang, L. S., Aziz, Z., Wang, H. J., & Chik, Z. (2025). Prevalence and disposal of unused medicines: A systematic review of cross-sectional studies. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Health Services Research*, 16(1), rmae028.



✓ PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE



TABLETS AND CAPSULES



LIQUID MEDICINES



INHALERS

✗ NOT PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE



NEEDLES AND SYRINGES



INFECTIOUS WASTE



MEDICAL DEVICES

✓ Pharmaceutical waste INCLUDES:

Solid dosage forms – tablets, capsules, pastilles, oriblets, powders

Liquid dosage forms – solutions, syrups, drops for eyes, ears, nose

Semi-solid pharmaceutical forms – ointments, creams, gels

Transdermal patches

Ampoules, foams

Inhalers and aerosols

Veterinary medicines

✗ Pharmaceutical waste DOES NOT INCLUDE:

Diet products

Teas

Infectious waste → needles, lancets and syringes, bandages, gauze, gloves

Medical devices

Thermometers

Empty medicine packaging and patient information leaflets

Cosmetic products

Disinfectants

Important: Regardless of whether it is a single tablet or a whole box, a prescription medicine or an over-the-counter medicine, any unused medicine is pharmaceutical waste and must be disposed of properly!

How do medicines pollute the environment?

You may be wondering: How can medicines from your home contaminate rivers or drinking water? The answer lies in how you dispose of unused or expired medicines.



RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- More than 770 medicines have been detected in the environment worldwide.
- More than 600 different medicines have been identified in the environment across Europe.
- Medicine residues have been found in almost 80% of European rivers and lakes.
- Analgesics such as ibuprofen and paracetamol are regularly detected in European rivers and springs.

United Nations Environment Programme. Pharmaceuticals in the Environment [Internet]. Nairobi: UNEP; 2024 [cited 2026 Aug 18]. Available from: <https://www.unep.org/topics/chemicals-and-pollution-action/chemicals-management/pollution-and-health/pharmaceuticals>

Paíga P, Figueiredo S, Correia M, André M, Barbosa R, Jorge S, et al. Occurrence of 97 Pharmaceuticals in Wastewater and Receiving Waters: Analytical Validation and Treatment Influence. *J Xenobiotics*. 2025;15(3):78. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3390/jox15030078>

THROWING IN HOUSEHOLD WASTE OR SEWAGE

Medicine thrown into municipal waste ends up in a landfill. Atmospheric precipitation can leach active substances and allow them to penetrate soil and groundwater. Medicines flushed down the toilet or poured down the sink or drain enter the sewage system, where conventional wastewater treatment plants cannot completely remove all medicine residues.

EXCRETION FROM THE BODY

After administration of the medicine, the active substance and its metabolites are excreted from the body in urine and feces. In this way, they end up in wastewater, and the plants for their purification usually do not remove them completely.

MOVEMENT THROUGH SOIL AND WATER

Medicines can get into the soil and through it reach groundwater, rivers and lakes. Certain substances are chemically stable and break down slowly, which is why they can remain in the environment for a long time.

ENTRY INTO PLANT AND ANIMAL ORGANISMS

Aquatic organisms are exposed to medicines present in the water, which can affect their growth, development and reproduction. Medicines present in the soil can be absorbed through the roots of plants and thus enter the food chain.

RETURN TO US

By entering the food chain, medicine residues can reach the human body and potentially endanger human health.

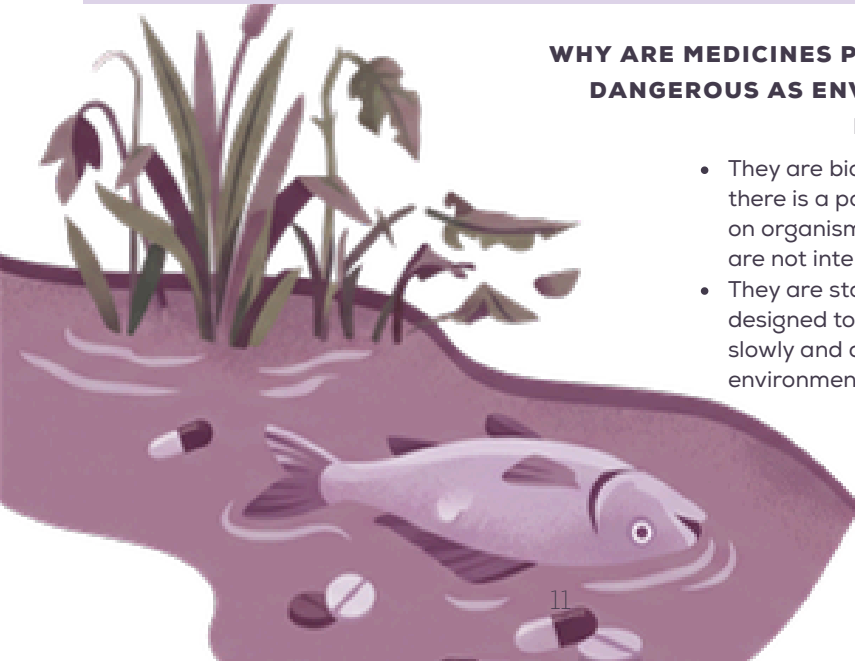
Impact on ecosystems

Medicines in the environment are not just a theoretical danger – they represent a real and measurable problem that affects all ecosystems.

MICROORGANISMS	PLANTS	ANIMALS
Reduction of the number and diversity of beneficial microorganisms in soil and water, disruption of natural processes (decomposition of organic matter and circulation of nutrients), development of antimicrobial resistance.	Disruption of germination, growth and development of plants, disruption of photosynthesis and metabolism, reduced availability of nutrients, disruption of plant resistance, accumulation of medicine residues in plant tissues, changes in the appearance and size of plants.	Impaired growth and development of animals, disruption of hormonal balance and reproductive functions, changes in behavior and reduced reproductive capacity, weakened immunity and increased susceptibility to infections, accumulation of medicine residues in tissues, changes in the physiology and structure of organs.

WHY ARE MEDICINES PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS AS ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTANTS?

- They are biologically active – there is a possibility of action on organisms for which they are not intended.
- They are stable – they are designed to break down slowly and can remain in the environment for a long time.



Examples of impacts on ecosystems

MICROORGANISMS	PLANTS	ANIMALS
Antibiotics in the environment encourage the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The World Health Organization has declared antimicrobial resistance as one of the greatest global threats to public health.	The presence of medicines in the soil can reduce the germination of plants by as much as 50%, slow down the growth of roots and shoots by 70% and lead to a significant reduction in yield. In addition, medicine residues can accumulate in plants that animals and humans use in their diet, thereby entering the food chain.	Medicines can cause changes in sexual characteristics in fish, damage the nervous system of bees, and disrupt the normal functioning of their behavior and development. Analgesics can damage the kidneys and liver of many animals, while cytostatics can cause DNA damage in organisms.

Even low concentrations of medicines can alter ecosystem structure over the long term!

IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES FOR HUMANS

Medicines in drinking water and food can have direct and indirect effects on health, especially for vulnerable groups.

Most vulnerable populations

- Infants and children – greater sensitivity to the harmful effects of medicines from the environment.
- Persons in the reproductive period – influence on hormonal balance and potential reduction of fertility.
- Pregnant women – influence on the development of the fetus and the risk of low birth weight in the child.
- Elderly – increased sensitivity, increased risk of interactions with existing therapy and diseases.
- People prone to allergies – reactions are possible even at very low concentrations of certain substances.

Economic costs

Costs of remediating the consequences of human exposure to pharmaceutical waste, including:

- Treatment of acute and chronic exposure to medicines from the environment,
- Changes in the treatment of infections due to antimicrobial resistance,
- More complex water purification,
- Remediation of environmental consequences.



The path of pharmaceutical waste into the environment – from the production and use of medicines to water pollution and potential environmental and health consequences

Improper use of antibiotics, premature discontinuation of therapy and storage of antibiotics in the household can contribute to the development of antimicrobial resistance – one of the greatest threats to public health in the 21st century.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). Pharmaceutical residues in freshwater: Hazards and policy responses. OECD Publishing.



Proper disposal of household medicines

Good news: proper disposal of medicines in Serbia is simple, free and available to all citizens. The system is there – we just need to use it.

In accordance with current regulations, pharmacies are obliged to collect pharmaceutical waste from households. Citizens are not charged for handing over unused and expired medicines in pharmacies.

Every pharmacy that participates in the pharmaceutical waste collection system accepts unused medicines from households and enables their safe and responsible disposal.



Step by step: handing in unused medicines

1. CHECK YOUR HOME MEDICINE CABINET

Once or twice a year, inspect your medicine cabinet and remove all unused, expired and damaged medicines from all rooms – kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, bags and other places where you store them.

2. PREPARE THE MEDICATIONS

Separate the medicines you no longer need and pack them in a clean bag. Do not remove them from the primary packaging (blister, bottle, tube, or ampoule). Close liquid medicines tightly to prevent leakage.

3. TAKE IT TO THE NEAREST PHARMACY

It is best to hand over the medicines to the pharmacy where you normally get them. You do not need any documentation. Give the medicines to the pharmacist or put them in the designated container, if there is one.

4. DONE!

You have contributed to environmental protection. The authorized company will take the medicines from the pharmacy and dispose of them in accordance with the regulations, under controlled conditions and with the application of appropriate environmental protection measures.



✓ CORRECT PROCEDURE:

- Bring the medicine to the pharmacy where you are supplied with the therapy.
- Use containers for disposing of pharmaceutical waste in pharmacies.
- Consult a pharmacist for advice.
- Keep medicines in their original packaging.

✗ WHAT YOU SHOULD NEVER DO:

- Throwing medicines down the toilet or drain.
- Dispose of medicines in household waste.
- Bury medicines in the garden or soil.
- Burn medicines at home.
- Give medicines to neighbors, friends or relatives.

EVERY MEDICINE HAS ITS PURPOSE – MAKE SURE IT ENDS UP IN THE RIGHT PLACE!



Examples of good practice

Some types of medicines and medical waste require special care when disposing of them.

CYTOTOXIC MEDICINES – MEDICINES USED TO TREAT CANCER

⚠ ATTENTION: Extremely dangerous!

Cytostatics are medicines used in the treatment of cancer, but they can cause serious side effects, including damage to blood cells and bone marrow, reduction of immunity, damage to organs (liver, kidneys), as well as genotoxic effects. Therefore, improper handling and disposal of these medicines is extremely dangerous.

Tip: Do not handle cytostatics with bare hands and do not dispose of them with other waste. Do not take the tablets out of the original box, but return them to the pharmacy or health care facility that manages your treatment for safe disposal.

MEDICINAL PATCHES

Transdermal patches, for example, for pain relief, smoking cessation, or hormone therapy, contain active substances even after use. Therefore, they may pose a risk even after removal from the skin.

Tip: Fold the patch so that the sticky side is facing in, put it in the original packaging or plastic bag and take it to the pharmacy.

PREFILLED PENS

⚠ Never dispose of used prefilled injection pens in household waste without following the appropriate disposal instructions. Such medicines pose a risk of accidental poisoning and can be a source of transmission of infections.

Tip: Contact your pharmacist for advice on how to do it right.

Common practice in many countries, including Europe, is to dispose of used foams in sturdy sharps containers, which are then taken to a pharmacy or healthcare facility for safe disposal.

LIQUID PHARMACEUTICAL DOSAGE FORMS

Liquid pharmaceutical forms often have a limited shelf life after opening, and are often not fully used. There is also a risk of spillage, which could lead to accidental exposure or environmental pollution.

Tip: Close solutions, syrups, drops for eyes, nose and ears tightly and never pour their contents down the drain. Take the whole, closed bottle to the pharmacy. Do not puncture, open or burn aerosols.

VETERINARY MEDICINES

Medicines intended for pets and domestic animals can be just as harmful to the environment as medicines for humans, especially if they are not disposed of properly. Some of them, such as antiparasitics, can be particularly toxic to aquatic organisms and disrupt ecosystems.

Tip: Hand over unused or remaining medications to a veterinary clinic or pharmacy for safe disposal.

MEDICINAL PRODUCT PACKAGING

Submit the packaging that was in direct contact with the medicine together with the medicine at the pharmacy. Medication packaging that was not in direct contact with the medication, such as boxes, can be disposed of in a suitable paper or plastic recycling container. You can dispose of the medication instructions in the paper recycling container.



How to reduce pharmaceutical waste?

Prevention of pharmaceutical waste generation – through rational prescribing, consultation with a pharmacist and proper storage – is a key strategy for environmental protection.

RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING OF MEDICINES

- Buy only the amount of medicine you need.
- When possible, choose smaller packages.
- Check the expiration date.
- Do not stock up on medicines unnecessarily.

PROPER USE OF MEDICINES

- Use the medication as directed.
- Do not stop treatment on your own.
- Consult a pharmacist about the correct use of medicines.
- Do not share medicines with others.

✓ PROPER STORAGE:

- Dry and dark place.
- Room temperature (15–25 °C).
- Refrigerate only if indicated.
- In original packaging with instructions.
- Out of reach of children and pets.

✗ IMPROPER STORAGE:

- In the bathroom – moisture damages medicines.
- Next to the stove or radiator.
- In the kitchen.
- In direct sunlight.
- In the car during the summer.
- Without original packaging.
- Within reach of children and pets.



CHECK YOUR HOME MEDICINE CABINET EVERY 6 MONTHS

Follow these five simple steps:

1. Take out expired medicines.
2. Set aside medications remaining after therapy is completed or changed.
3. Check whether the packages are damaged or the appearance of the medicines has changed.
4. Check that the medicines are stored in the right conditions.
5. Take unused medicines to the pharmacy – don't wait for them to accumulate!

Legal framework of the Republic of Serbia

The Republic of Serbia has established a legal framework for pharmaceutical and medical waste management, progressively aligning its legislation with European Union requirements.

Pharmaceutical waste requires special care because certain active substances can have a harmful effect on the environment and human health, and certain groups of medicines are classified as hazardous pharmaceutical waste.

EU DIRECTIVES RELEVANT TO PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT:

Directive 2008/98/EC - establishes the basic framework for waste management in the EU.

Directive 2004/27/EC - establishes a system for the collection of unused medicines.

Directive (EU) 2024/3019 - municipal wastewater treatment.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A CITIZEN:

- The right to information about the proper disposal of your pharmaceutical waste.
- The right to free disposal of unused medicines at the pharmacy.
- The right to information about how your waste is disposed of.



LAW ON WASTE MANAGEMENT – "OFF. GAZ. RS", NO. 109/25

This law regulates the types and classification of waste, planning and organization of waste management, subjects, responsibilities and obligations, management of special waste flows, permits, cross-border movement of waste, reporting and database, financing, supervision, as well as other issues of importance for waste management. Waste management is defined as an activity of general interest.

RULEBOOK ON CATEGORIES, TESTING AND CLASSIFICATION OF WASTE – ("OFF. GAZ. RS", NO. 56/10, 93/19, 39/21 AND 65/24)

This rulebook prescribes the Catalog of waste, lists of waste categories, procedures and methods of waste disposal, limit values of hazardous components, parameters for testing physico-chemical properties and waste treatment, as well as the content and form of the test report and the waste classification procedure.

RULEBOOK ON MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT – "OFF. GAZ. RS", NO. 30/26

It specifically regulates the handling of medical waste. This rulebook regulates the medical waste management plan, as well as the manner and procedure of its management in health institutions and other places of provision of health services.

RULEBOOK ON THE MANNER AND PROCEDURE OF PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT – "OFF. GAZ. RS", NO. 49/2019

This ordinance regulates the procedure for managing pharmaceutical waste, including its classification, collection, packaging, labeling, storage, transportation and treatment. Pharmacies are obliged to collect pharmaceutical waste from citizens free of charge and hand it over to authorized operators.

LAW ON MEDICINES AND MEDICAL DEVICES – "OFF. GAZ. RS", NO. 30/10, 107/12, 113/17 AND 105/17

It regulates the production, circulation, quality control and safety of medicines and medical devices, as well as the system of their approval and monitoring in the Republic of Serbia.

Roles of institutions

Proper disposal of pharmaceutical waste relies on the cooperation of several institutions. Here is who is responsible for what.

PHARMACIES - YOUR FIRST POINT OF CONTACT

Pharmacies are obliged to collect pharmaceutical waste from citizens free of charge. If the pharmacy belongs to an institution that has designated another organizational unit for that purpose, it must collect the medicines and forward them to the disposal site. Pharmacies have special red containers for pharmaceutical waste and submit reports on collected pharmaceutical waste to the Environmental Protection Agency. The pharmacy is your **FIRST** point of contact for all questions about medication management. The pharmacist determines the nature of the waste, based on which it is classified. In addition, the pharmacist provides information on the rational use of medicines, prevention of pharmaceutical waste and rules for its disposal.

AUTHORISED WASTE COLLECTION AND TREATMENT COMPANIES

Specialised and authorised companies transport collected pharmaceutical waste from pharmacies and healthcare institutions to licensed waste treatment facilities. They apply controlled procedures to prevent environmental pollution and harmful effects on human and animal health.

HOSPITALS AND HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

They manage pharmaceutical waste in accordance with special regulations. Patients receiving home chemotherapy or other specific therapies can contact the hospital for instructions on proper disposal of medicine residues.

ALIMS – MEDICINES AND MEDICAL DEVICES AGENCY OF SERBIA

Citizens can contact ALIMS for all information related to medicines, while the handling of pharmaceutical waste is monitored by competent authorities for environmental protection.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE MEDICINES WE HAND OVER?

1. The pharmacy collects medicines in special containers for pharmaceutical waste.
2. The authorized operator takes over the collected pharmaceutical waste from pharmacies.
3. The waste is transported to facilities authorized for the treatment of pharmaceutical waste.
4. The destruction of pharmaceutical waste is carried out under controlled conditions, with the application of prescribed environmental protection measures.

This prevents medicines from ending up in household waste, sewage, soil or water.

Pharmaceutical waste is not treated together with municipal waste. It is safely destroyed in special facilities that work in accordance with strict environmental protection standards. Since there is currently no such facility in Serbia, pharmaceutical waste is most often exported to European Union countries for safe treatment.



Frequently Asked Questions by Citizens

WHERE CAN I HAND OVER MEDICINES THAT I NO LONGER NEED?

Medicines should be taken to the pharmacy where you got them on prescription or bought them. If the pharmacy does not have the conditions for their storage, it should take them over and forward them to another organizational unit that is responsible for their care.

IS THERE A CHARGE FOR HANDING OVER MEDICINES AT THE PHARMACY?

Not. Handing over unused medicines at the pharmacy is free for citizens.

CAN I THROW THE MEDICINE IN THE TRASH IF IT IS IN THE ORIGINAL BOX?

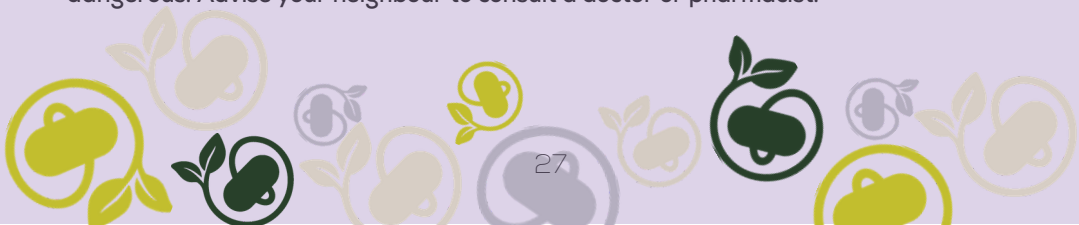
Not. The original box does not make the medicine safe for disposal. Waste active substances can get into the environment, which is why the medicines should be handed over to the pharmacy.

WHAT IF THE MEDICINE HAS NOT EXPIRED, BUT I NO LONGER NEED IT?

Such medicine should also be handed over to the pharmacy. Keeping medicines that you no longer need increases the risk of improper use and accidental ingestion.

CAN I GIVE MEDICINE TO A NEIGHBOUR WHO HAS THE SAME SYMPTOMS?

Not. The same symptoms can have different causes, and sharing medicines can be dangerous. Advise your neighbour to consult a doctor or pharmacist.



WHY SHOULD MEDICINES NOT BE DISPOSED OF DOWN THE SINK OR TOILET?

Wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove medicine residues. Because of this, some of the discarded medicines can end up in rivers, lakes and other aquatic ecosystems.

CAN I BURN OLD MEDICINES IN THE YARD?

Absolutely not. Burning medicines at home releases harmful substances into the air and soil. Pharmaceutical waste can be destroyed only in authorized facilities.

HOW DO I KNOW IF THE MEDICINE HAS EXPIRED?

Each medicine has an expiration date in the format MM/YYYY. The medicine can be used until the last day of the specified month. Drops and certain other preparations may have a shorter shelf life after opening, so it is necessary to read the instructions for the medicine and act according to them.

WHAT IF THE PHARMACY REFUSES TO TAKE MY MEDICATION?

Insist that the pharmacy where you normally take your medication comply with the Act and collect your pharmaceutical waste.



Useful contacts and resources

ALIMS – AGENCY FOR MEDICINES AND MEDICAL DEVICES OF SERBIA



www.alims.gov.rs



hygia@alims.gov.rs



+381 11 3951 131

For information about medicines, their safe use and reporting irregularities in relation to medicines. ALIMS on its official website lists the contact phone number +381 11 3951 131 and e-mail hygia@alims.gov.rs.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA



www.zdravlje.gov.rs



011/361-6631

For additional information on pharmaceutical waste management.

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA



www.ekologija.gov.rs

For information on regulations in the field of environmental protection and waste management.

PHARMACEUTICAL CHAMBER OF SERBIA

 www.farmkom.rs
 komora@farmkom.rs
 011/3246795

For information about pharmacy activity and good pharmacy practice.

ASSOCIATION OF PHARMACISTS OF THE NIŠAVA–PIROT REGION

 www.udruzenjefnp.rs
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 +381 601317108

Coordinator of the Erasmus+ PharmWaste project.

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR THE NEAREST PHARMACY?

Type "pharmacy" into Google Maps.



By sharing content from our pages, you help ensure that information on the proper disposal of pharmaceutical waste reaches as many people as possible.

Thank you!

For more information about the project and our activities, follow us on social networks:

Instagram:
PharmWaste



LinkedIn
Pharm Waste



Facebook
PharmWaste



or visit our website: pharmwaste.eu



REMEMBER!

PROPER DISPOSAL OF MEDICINES:

contributes to environmental preservation,
prevents soil, water, and air pollution,
contributes to preserving water and food quality,
reduces the risk of antimicrobial resistance,
contributes to the preservation of human health.

**Save the Earth,
dispose pharmaceutical waste smartly!**

Share this guide with friends and family!

By scanning the QR code, you can access the digital form of the guide



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Progressus
iz prakse za praksu



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Dizajn: **SLEEK**