



Department of Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

SALLY DRESLIN, M.S., R.N.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

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Dear Colleagues:

Greetings! As we enter cold and flu season, I would like to call your attention this month to the appropriate prescribing of antibiotics in light of the growing threat of antibiotic resistance. The New York State Department of Health (Department) has developed Adult/Pediatric Antibiotic Prescribing Guidelines that may be of assistance to you in optimizing antibiotic prescribing. Secondly, with the ongoing opioid epidemic, I thought it would be helpful to highlight procedures for opioid medication disposal.

Antibiotic Prescribing Guidelines: Physicians play an important role in fighting antibiotic resistance by adhering to optimal antibiotic prescribing. Yet I have been hearing concerns that the current guidelines are too dense or too lengthy for quick, easy reference during patient encounters.

To address this concern, the Department has developed an abbreviated set of guidelines that streamline national outpatient clinical treatment guidelines for common infections for both adult and pediatric patients. The abbreviated guidelines address adult conditions, such as acute rhinosinusitis, acute uncomplicated bronchitis, common cold/non-specific upper respiratory tract infection (URI), pharyngitis, and acute uncomplicated cystitis; as well as pediatric conditions, such as acute rhinosinusitis, acute otitis media, pharyngitis, common cold/non-specific upper respiratory tract infection (URI), bronchitis, and urinary tract infections (UTI).

This simple, easy-to-use pocket guide is available in three free versions:

- A hard-copy reference card available from the Department
- An electronic reference card for download and printing
- An electronic version that could be used to integrate guidelines into your electronic health record and prescribing system

Each version can be easily printed and posted within the clinical setting. These pocket guidelines should expedite antibiotic prescribing for the busy healthcare provider by facilitating the selection of appropriate antibiotics, as well as highlighting specific situations when antibiotics are not recommended.

The Department's guidelines were released in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) "US Antibiotic Awareness Week," held November 13-19, 2017. For more information on how to access the Antibiotic Prescribing Guidelines, please visit [\[https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1174_11x17.pdf\]](https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1174_11x17.pdf).

Opioid Medication Disposal: As health professionals, we are keenly aware of the dangers of opioid diversion, misuse, and abuse. We have increasing responsibility to work with our patients to ensure they receive the appropriate dose, for the appropriate condition, and the correct length of time; they are aware of alternative treatment; know the warning signs of addiction; know how to properly dispose of dangerous controlled substance medications; and are educated about the resources available to them including overdose prevention and access to naloxone.

On October 28, the Department partnered with the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) for National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day. New Yorkers disposed of their unused and expired medications at over 280 sites across New York State, as part of a nationwide effort resulting in record collection amounts. If you or any of your patients missed the Take-Back Day, some sites remain open year-round for convenient medication disposal. To easily find one, use the DEA's online medication disposal site locator tool at:

<https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main?execution=e1s1>. For a list of locations, by county, of law enforcement agencies participating in the New York State Medication Drop Box Program, visit https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/narcotic/medication_drop_boxes/county_list.htm.

I would also like to highlight two more innovative programs designed to prevent opioid misuse and overdose.

- In May of this year, the Albany County Department of Health launched [Project Orange](#), a program designed for pharmacies to educate residents about the importance of storing opioid medications safely and securely at home, as well as how to appropriately dispose of unused medications. The program offers drop box locations and free mail back envelopes from Project Orange pharmacies.
- The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has launched a two-year [Pilot Pharmaceutical Take-Back Program](#), which places medication drop boxes in community pharmacies, hospitals, and long-term care facilities for easy and safe disposal of unused medications.

I strongly encourage you to speak with your patients about safe disposal options for unused or expired opioids and ask if patients have any unused opioids in their home. If they do, you can counsel the patient on the following:

- Safe and appropriate storage of medications
- Dangers of keeping or sharing unused medications
- Appropriate disposal of unused medications

Finally, I would like to provide information about New York [State's Naloxone Co-payment Assistance Program](#). This program provides co-payment assistance to individuals with prescription health insurance coverage (including Medicaid, Medicare, and commercial insurance). For individuals without prescription coverage, New York has a network of registered opioid overdose prevention programs for training and access to naloxone at no cost. For more information, please visit [Availability of Naloxone in Pharmacies](#).

New Yorkers struggling with an addiction, or whose loved ones are struggling, can find help and hope by calling the state's toll-free, 24-hour, 7-day-a-week HOPELine at 1-877-8-HOPENY (1-877-846-7369) or by texting HOPENY (Short Code 467369).

Thank you for all your hard work in keeping New Yorkers healthy. Wishing you a Happy Thanksgiving.

Sincerely,

Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner of Health