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Lewis County General Hospital joins DEC drug take-back pilot program

By JEN JACKSON
JJACKSON@WDT.NET
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LOWVILLE — Lewis County General Hospital will be one of 80 participating locations in the state's first drug-takeback program.

Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Basil Seggos on Thursday announced the Pilot Pharmaceutical Take-Back Program, a \$2 million effort to protect New York's residents and waterways from unused and improperly disposed of medications.

"By placing medication drop boxes in (community facilities,) we are increasing opportunities for New Yorkers to properly and easily dispose of unwanted medications," Mr. Seggos said in a public statement in Albany. "Participants in New York's free drug takeback program are protecting their communities and the environment."

Pharmacies, hospitals and long-term-care facilities throughout the state remain eligible to enroll in the program.

Beginning in April, the DEC will purchase medication collection boxes and pay for the disposal of waste pharmaceuticals collected by pilot program participants for two years.

"(T)his program will help address drug abuse and reduce water quality impacts throughout the state," Scott Cassel, chief executive officer and founder of the Product Stewardship Institute, which has promoted drug takeback programs nationwide for the past decade, said in the statement.

"However, sustainable funding from drug manufacturers — mandated through extended producer responsibility laws — is still needed to make these programs effective on a state or national scale."

In the midst of an opioid epidemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports 91 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose — nearly four people an hour.

As of Nov. 13, Lewis County had confirmed 10 overdose deaths so far in 2017, with several other cases pending results of toxicology reports, according to Lewis County District Attorney and Coroner Leanne K. Moser.

In Jefferson County, by November there had been 17 confirmed overdose deaths.

Not only is the program aimed at keeping dangerous, unused medications such as opioids, painkillers and narcotics out of vulnerable hands; but also, DEC officials hope, it will reduce pharmaceutical contamination of the water system.

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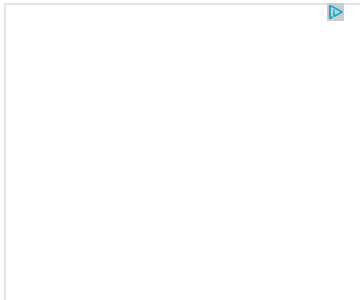


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Flushed medications have been found in the state's lakes, rivers and streams, harming fish and other aquatic wildlife and even leading to drug-resistant bacteria. In 2000, the U.S. Geological Survey studied waterways nationwide.

Low levels of antibiotics, hormones, steroids and other drugs were found in 80 percent of rivers and streams tested.

Until the program kicks off, existing medication drop-off sites, including the Jefferson County and St. Lawrence County Sheriff's Departments, can be found at www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/67720.html along with disposal guidelines.

The pilot program continues to accept applications from retail pharmacies, hospitals and long-term care facilities online at the DEC's website or at on.ny.gov/rxpilot.



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