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# Two new prescription drug disposal sites come to St. Lawrence County

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A new program to increase access to safe prescription drug disposal began collecting unused medications in St. Lawrence County Tuesday.

Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center in Ogdensburg and Gouverneur Hospital are both participating in the Drug Take-Back Program launched by the Product Stewardship Institute and the New York Product Stewardship Council.

The six-month pilot program allows residents to drop off unwanted, expired, or leftover medications at locked collection kiosk sites at either hospital, or via pre-paid mail-back envelopes, at no cost and with “no questions asked.”

The program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and hoped to increase public health safety and reduce the negative environmental impact of improperly disposed-of prescriptions.

“More than 2,000 people in New York State die annually from opioid overdose — most commonly from prescription pain relievers,” said Andrew Radin, NYPSC chair and recycling director for Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency, in a public statement.

“We are honored to work with this impressive coalition to safeguard the environmental and public health of New York communities.”

“As a pharmacist, I recognize the dire need for convenient, safe drug disposal options,” said pharmacist and Director of Pharmacy Services at Gouverneur Hospital Susan Bradley, in a public statement.

“We are providing a critical service, and our hospital benefits from increased loyalty and appreciation among our patient community.”

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 the end of last year, 18 people in Jefferson County had died from drug overdoses in 2017,

with another possible fatality pending toxicological confirmation.

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

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.

The program will continue through July.

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