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Walmart is hoping a simple packet could help curb opioid misuse

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Walmart, the third-largest pharmacy in the US, wants to give people who receive prescriptions that are frequently misused a safe way to get rid of them for free.

QUOTES IN THE ARTICLE

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The company said on Wednesday that it will provide packets of DisposeRx, a powder that when combined with water and opioid painkiller prescriptions turns the pills into a gel that can then be thrown away safely. The hope is that by finding simpler ways to dispose of leftover painkillers, fewer pills can be misused.

More than 50% of people who abuse prescription opioids obtain them through friends and

family, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That's proving to be a major problem as the opioid crisis rages on in the US, with more than 63,600 people killed by opioid painkillers in 2016. Roughly 40% of those deaths involved a prescription opioid, the CDC reports.

Here's how the disposal system works

Say after a recent surgery, your doctor prescribed you seven doses of Percocet, a drug that contains acetaminophen and oxycodone. You might take just two pills and then realize that acetaminophen alone (the ingredient in Tylenol) works just as well to manage the pain you're feeling while recovering.

In most cases, those remaining five pills may sit in the medicine cabinet unused until you take the time to find a location that can dispose of it properly.

What Walmart wants to do by including packets along with the prescription is to make it possible for you to dispose of those five pills at home for free. To do that, fill the canister the prescription came in 2/3 full with water with the prescription inside, then add the packet of powder.

After shaking the canister for 30 seconds, the solution solidifies into a biodegradable gel that can then be thrown away without the concern that the opioids might get into the environment.

Once the pills have been dissolved, it's relatively difficult to extract the opioid as well, DisposeRx CEO John Holaday told reporters on a call.

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