

The Truth About Expiration Dates

Hey Preppers,

As a physician, I get a lot of questions about expiration dates on medications, and whether medications should be thrown out once they hit that date. In the preparedness community, most of us accumulate medicines for use in an uncertain future. Part of that uncertainty is not knowing when or if our society will finally enter a full-blown collapse. Even government agencies wonder if all the medical supplies they've stockpiled will still be effective years after expiration. So, let's discuss what an expiration date really means.



Expiration dates have been mandated for medications since 1979. The expiration date is the last date that the pharmaceutical company will guarantee that the drug is at 100% full potency. Except in very rare cases, there is no evidence that suggests that there is anything harmful about that medication if used after that date. In other words, they don't magically become poisonous or cause you to grow a third eye in the middle of your forehead. Now that you know that, the question is whether the drug loses its beneficial effects and how fast it does so.

FEMA and the Department of Defense are government agencies that stockpile huge stores of medications for use in the event of a major emergency, such as a natural disaster or national emergency. FEMA has seen massive stores of medication expire, and so a study was commissioned to find out how effective these expired medications still were. This study is known as the Shelf Life Extension Program (SLEP). This program has evaluated at least 100 medications that were expired for at least 2 to 10 years at the time they were evaluated. This includes many commonly used antibiotics and other medications that could mean the difference between life and death in a collapse situation.

After extensive study, the vast majority of these medications were found to be completely effective for their intended use, including some that were 10 years beyond their expiration date. In the most recent swine flu epidemic a couple of years back, the SLEP granted an official use authorization for a popular anti-viral drug, Tamiflu, that extended its use to 5 full years after its expiration date. The other medicines, however, have not had official use authorizations announced, even though this information would be useful to millions of people. I first wrote about this in my article on survivalblog (7/28/10) called "[A Doctor's Thoughts on Antibiotics, Expiration Dates and TEOTWAWKI](#)". Since that time, I have found that I can no longer access the results of the study, as it now takes special access to get to the information in it. My guess is the pharmaceutical industry might have had a hand in this; they prefer that people throw away their medications the day after the expiration date, so they can buy "fresh" merchandise. Despite this, you can obtain a back copy of *The Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences*, Vol. 95, No. 7, July 2006, where you will find a summary of the SLEP data.

Therefore, I put forth to you this recommendation: Do not throw away medications that are in pill or capsule form after their expiration dates if you are stockpiling for a collapse. Liquid medications are different, such as insulin or liquid pediatric antibiotics; their formulation causes them to degrade too quickly. A sign of this is a change in the color of the liquid, among other things. Try not to accumulate drugs in liquid form unless there is no other choice. On the other hand, tablets or capsules will be effective when we no longer have the ability to mass-produce these medicines, even if they lose some potency over time.

I'm aware that this is against the conventional medical wisdom, but we may find ourselves in a situation one day where something is better than nothing. Also, research natural remedies that may have antibacterial action, such as garlic and honey. Remember that drugs will retain their effectiveness best if stored in a cool, dry, dark location. Planning ahead, we all must consider all alternatives in the effort to stay healthy in hard times. Don't ignore any option that can help you achieve that goal.

Dr. Bones

Are you prepared to deal with medical issues in disaster situations where help is NOT on the way? With the Doom and Bloom(tm) Survival Medicine Handbook, you will be!

Check out the trailer here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kb3vdQecUPM>