



Health Services Agency

Syringe Services Program (SSP)

Safer Smoking Supplies & Referrals

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Syringe Service Program Benefits Summary

- Syringe service programs (SSPs) are proven to be safe, effective, and cost-saving.
- SSPs do not increase illegal drug use or crime and play a crucial role in reducing viral hepatitis, HIV, and other infections.
- SSPs offering naloxone contribute to a decrease in opioid overdose deaths.
- SSPs facilitate safe syringe disposal, protecting the public and first responders.
- SSP participants are 5x more likely to enter drug treatment programs and 3x more likely to stop injecting drugs.
- When combined with Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), SSPs result in over two-thirds reduction in HIV and HCV transmission and lower drug-related risks, such as endocarditis, skin infections, and vein damage.

Syringe Service Program Benefits

- 30 years of research has shown that comprehensive syringe service programs (SSPs):
 - are safe, effective, and cost-saving,
 - do not increase illegal drug use or crime,
 - play an important role in reducing the transmission of viral hepatitis, HIV and other infections.
- SSPs that provide naloxone help decrease opioid overdose deaths.
- SSPs protect the public and first responders by facilitating syringe disposal.
- More than 90 percent of syringes distributed are returned.

Syringe Service Program Benefits

- SSP participants show a high readiness to reduce or stop their drug use.
 - They are 5x more likely to enter drug treatment programs and 3x more likely to stop injecting drugs.
- SSPs are associated with an approximately 50% reduction in HIV and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) incidence.
- HIV and HCV transmission is reduced by more than two-thirds when combined with MAT.

Shift in Drug Administration

From Injecting to Smoking

- Changes in drug availability and preferences, along with the practical and social advantages of smoking over injecting, including stigma, have contributed to the increased use of pipes.
- The shift towards pipe use is also influenced by awareness of health risks associated with injecting, such as bloodborne infections, and public health efforts that promote safer methods like smoking.
- Specific reasons for the shift:
 - Difficulty accessing veins
 - Cost of fentanyl versus heroin
 - Perceived decreased overdose risk
 - Preference of “high” from smoking

Source: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.109003>, https://adai.uw.edu/wordpress/wpcontent/uploads/SaferSmokingBrief_2022.pdf, and <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38464097/>

Pipe Use and Disease Transmission

- Pipe sharing has been associated with the transmission of Hepatitis C and HIV.
 - Pipes are known to produce wounds in and around the mouth.
 - These wounds may make smokers more vulnerable to HIV during oral sex or sharing of pipes.
- HCV has been found in used pipes and sharing of pipes is associated with HCV infection.
- Pipe sharing has also been implicated in outbreaks of other diseases, such as tuberculosis.
- Access to non-injection drug use materials reduces sharing and the risk of respiratory infections and possibly transmission of COVID-19.

Safer Smoking Supplies Reduce Risk

Summary

- Safer smoking materials, alongside health education and care, assist in preventing initiation of injection drug use and facilitate transition to safer modes of administration.
- Safer smoking supplies support drug use cessation efforts.
- Safer smoking supplies reduce the risk of respiratory infections such as influenza and tuberculosis and injuries from damaged pipes.
- Authorized syringe service programs gained access to safer smoking supplies in January 2020 from CDPH.

Smoking vs. Injecting

Risk for Overdose and Other Negative Outcomes

- In a California study of 999 SSP participants:
 - 66% participants had used fentanyl in the last 90 days.
 - 91% smoked fentanyl
 - 59% smoked fentanyl only and 41% injected as well.
- Those who smoked fentanyl were:
 - 29% less likely to experience a non-fatal overdose
 - 60% less likely to develop a skin and soft tissue infection (SSTI)
 - Average hospital stay:
 - Injectors: 1.2 nights
 - Smokers: 0.7 nights

Source: [Health risks associated with smoking versus injecting fentanyl among people who use drugs in California - ScienceDirect](#)

Risk Reduction Related to Smoking

- Drug-related risk is lowered every time a person chooses to smoke instead of inject.
- Harms associated with injecting drugs, including endocarditis, skin infections, and vein damage, are specific to injecting.
 - Major contributors of morbidity and mortality
 - Expensive to treat
- Public health has encouraged the provision of smoking supplies to reduce equipment sharing or the use of makeshift or damaged equipment.
 - Injuries, SSTI's and the spread of infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C Virus are reduced.

Source: [Health risks associated with smoking versus injecting fentanyl among people who use drugs in California - ScienceDirect](#)

Risk Reduction Related to Smoking

- CDPH has determined that safer smoking materials, alongside health education and other care:
 - Help individuals avoid initiation of injection drug use
 - Allow people who inject drugs to transition from injection to safer modes of administration
 - Aid in drug use cessation
- Safer smoking supplies reduce the risk of respiratory infections including influenza and tuberculosis, and injuries such as cuts and burns from using damaged pipes.
- Safer smoking supplies were made available to authorized syringe services programs in January 2020.

Source: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/CDPH%20Document%20Library/IssueBrief_Smoking_Supplies_Web_ADA.pdf

Santa Cruz County SSP

Safer Smoking Kit Distribution

- Pipe distribution began in limited shifts in October of 2020, safer smoking kits are now distributed on all shifts.
- SSP participants receiving pipes were asked if the availability of smoking supplies would reduce their use of syringes.
 - Most participants believed availability would reduce syringe usage.

	Syringes Dispensed	Syringes/visit
October 2020	27,526	171
January 2023	14,556	32.6

- Participants are encouraged not to share pipes to reduce the possible transmission of HCV and other infections.

Safer Smoking Kit



Smoking vs. Injecting

- Injecting less frequently is associated with **lower risk of bloodborne pathogen transmission**
- Risk of **overdose is far less likely** when smoking vs. injecting
- Injecting less frequently is associated with **fewer skin and soft tissue infections**
- Some of the **harmful and infectious drug use, like endocarditis, are injection-specific**
- Reduces community syringe litter



Santa Cruz County Syringe
Services Program

SSP Referrals and Linkages

Treatment Services

- Detox/ withdrawal management
- Outpatient programs
- Intensive outpatient programs
- Inpatient/ residential programs
- Community support groups
- Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)

Community Resources

- Enhanced care management/ case management services
- Housing Connectors/ housing resources
- Medical care
- Benefits
- Mental health
- Food resources
- Pet care resources
- Probation success center
- Community support groups and population-specific resource centers
- Employment services
- STI Testing services

Offering general support and resources is key to building rapport and trust with participants.

Substance Use Disorder Treatment Referrals Overall

Fixed Sites September 1, 2023–February 29, 2024	
Number of unique participants	957
Percent of unique participants answering “yes” at any point to Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) treatment Referral	10.76%

Santa Cruz Mobile Exchange August 30, 2023–March 13, 2024	
Number of unique participants	556
Percent of unique participants answering “yes” at any point to Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) Treatment Referral	7.73%



*Due to the anonymous nature of SSP, specific referrals are not able to be tracked with current reporting.

Substance Use Disorder Treatment Referrals

Safer Smoking Supplies

Fixed Sites September 1, 2023–February 29, 2024	
Number of unique participants that received safer smoking kits	266
Percent of unique participants that received safer smoking kits and answered “yes” at any point to SUDs Treatment Referral	19.5%
Santa Cruz Mobile Exchange August 30, 2023–March 13, 2024	
Number of unique participants that received safer smoking kits	499
Percent of unique participants that received safer smoking kits and answered “yes” at any point to SUDs Treatment Referral	8.2%



*Due to the anonymous nature of SSP, specific referrals are not able to be tracked with current reporting.

Conclusions

- Distribution of safer smoking kits:
 - Reduce health risks from sharing smoking supplies.
 - Reduce the higher-risk practice of injecting.
 - Expand engagement opportunities with people who smoke drugs and do not inject.
- Strengthening public health and harm reduction services to address overdose risk related to diverse routes of drug use, including smoking and other noninjection routes, can reduce drug overdose deaths and is an effective strategy to address the opioid epidemic.

Source: https://adai.uw.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/SaferSmokingBrief_2022.pdf and <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7306a2.htm>

Citations

- Kral, A. H., Lambdin, B. H., Browne, E. N., Wenger, L. D., Bluthenthal, R. N., Zibbell, J. E., & Davidson, P. J. (2021). Transition from injecting opioids to smoking fentanyl in San Francisco, California. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 227, 109003. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.109003>
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