



County of Santa Cruz

Safe Use and Overdose Prevention Program (SUOPP)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a syringe exchange program?

Since the late 1980s, California syringe services programs (SSPs) have been providing sterile syringes, collecting used ones, and acting as a point of access to health care and help for people who use drugs. SSPs play a critical role in California's approach to infectious disease prevention and have been instrumental in sharply reducing HIV infections in the state and preventing transmission of other blood-borne diseases. SSPs now serve as the frontline care providers in California's ongoing efforts to stop drug overdose deaths. On September 24, 2024, the County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors approved the recommendation to rename our SSP to Safe Use and Overdose Prevention Program (SUOPP).

2. Does the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency (HSA) SUOPP give syringes to people who don't bring in used syringes?

Yes. On June 3rd, 2025, the County Board of Supervisors approved a recommendation to authorize the Public Health Division to align the County-administered Safe Use and Overdose Prevention Program (SUOPP) exchange services with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's evidence-based best practices. Prior to the approval, the SUOPP had a 1-for-1 syringe exchange policy which required a participant to bring a used needle to exchange for a sterile syringe with other restrictions capping the total number of syringes a participant could receive during an encounter. Needs-based syringe exchange prioritizes distribution of sterile syringes to people who inject drugs without requiring used syringes in return. This policy is recommended by the CDC ([cdc_112935_DS1\(1\).pdf](#)) to reduce the spread of infectious diseases like HIV and other blood-borne pathogens. Participants who present at our exchange sites requesting syringes without syringes to dispose of consult with staff to determine the number of sterile syringes needed between program visits. Staff also discuss a disposal plan with participants who request syringes without bringing in used syringes to exchange and all participants are offered sharps containers.

3. How do we know syringe exchange reduces the number of HIV infections?

Because syringe exchange has been politically contentious, it is the most thoroughly studied public health intervention of the past thirty years. These studies have consistently shown that syringe exchange reduces new HIV infections, increases successful uptake of drug treatment, and does not result in increased crime, violence, or syringe litter in communities in which they are started. Federally funded reports have concluded that syringe exchanges reduce the transmission of HIV while not increasing drug use.

More information on the effectiveness of SSPs can be found here:

[Safety and Effectiveness of Syringe Services Programs | Syringe Services Programs \(SSPs\) | CDC](#)

4. Along with syringes, what other supplies are participants of the syringe exchange program receiving?

The Santa Cruz County SUOPP follows the evidence-based recommendation to provide supplies that reduce harm to those who are injecting. Other supplies offered at SUOPP include Naloxone to reverse opioid overdose, sharps containers, bandages, safer sex supplies such as condoms and lubricant, caps/cookers, tourniquets, water, cotton, alcohol wipes, razors, and toothbrushes. The program also distributes pipes and smoking supplies to provide a safer alternative to injection drug use. Providing necessary supply items reduces the potential disease and infection risks associated with the re-use of injection equipment. Blood-borne infections such as Hepatitis C can be transmitted through sharing any piece of injection equipment with blood on it. Re-use of supplies can also lead to serious bacterial infections, such as wound abscesses and endocarditis.

Our SSP began limited distribution of pipes in October of 2020 at our Emeline exchange site. In January 2021 we expanded distribution of pipes to all shifts and exchange sites. More information on Smoking Supplies for Harm Reduction: [Issue Brief: Smoking Supplies for Harm Reduction \(ca.gov\)](#).

5. What other services does the County SUOPP provide?

The SUOPP provides referrals to HSA Clinics for medical treatment of wounds, infectious diseases and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for substance use disorder, educates clients on available countywide drug treatment options, housing and shelter assistance referrals, provides naloxone overdose prevention and reversal training, offers referrals for HIV/HCV C testing, contraceptives, and enrollment in health care.

6. Does the Santa Cruz County SUOPP hand out educational materials?

Yes, the SUOPP provides participants with a broad range of educational materials. Topics include drug treatment and rehabilitation, infectious disease such as Hepatitis C and HIV information and prevention, testing resources, safer injection techniques, and syringe disposal.

7. What to do if you find syringes in the community?

If you have found syringes in the community, first determine if they are located in a place where they present a **threat to public safety**.

-If so, **call 911**, and the city police or Sheriff's Office will be dispatched, depending upon the location of the property.

-If no threat to public safety exists and within an incorporated city, call the city's police non-emergency number:

-Capitola: (831) 475-4242

-Santa Cruz: (831) 471-1131

-Scotts Valley: (831) 440-5670

-Watsonville: (831) 768-3300

If no threat to public safety exists and the property is located in an unincorporated area of the county, call the **Santa Cruz Department of Public Works at 454-2160** to report the finding and request removal.

If syringes are found on *private property in the unincorporated area of the county*, please call **Environmental Health at 454-2022** to report the finding and request removal.

For non-emergencies, you can also download the My Santa Cruz County App on your smart phone to use the "report issue" function for syringe litter outside of the City of Santa Cruz. The appropriate agency will receive notification based on geolocation.

More information on Syringe Services Programs can be found here:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/index.html>

California Department of Public Health website:

https://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CID/DOA/Pages/OA_prev_sep.aspx

Please also visit our website for additional information regarding the program, monthly data reports, and education resources:

www.santacruzhealth.org/SSP