



County of Santa Cruz Syringe Services Program (SSP) 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.

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

Our SSP has a 1-for-1 syringe exchange policy. For each used needle a participant brings to exchange, they get a clean one in return. If they bring 10 used needles, they get 10 new needles, etc. The number of needles a participant can receive is capped at 100. A participant can exchange for themselves and up to two individuals who are not present (secondary exchange) with the 1-for-1 policy and cap at 100 for each participant still enforced. This policy caps the total number of sterile syringes a participant can receive at 300 if the participant brings 300 or more used syringes for disposal. If a participant presents at the exchange program without used syringes, they are referred to HSA Clinics for a clinical assessment to be provided or prescribed clean syringes. The participant may also be referred to local pharmacies if they are unable to visit our clinic.

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 SSP follows the evidence-based recommendation to provide supplies that reduce harm to those who are injecting. Providing necessary supply items in addition to clean syringes, will reduce 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 that may have blood on it. Re-use of supplies can also lead to serious bacterial infections, such as wound abscesses and endocarditis. Other supplies offered at the SSP include but are not limited to: pipes and smoking supplies for a safer mode of drug use alternative to injection, naloxone, sharps containers, bandages, condoms, lubricant, caps/cookers, tourniquets, water, cotton, alcohol wipes, razors, and toothbrushes.

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 SSP Program provide?

The SSP Program 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 SSP Program hand out educational materials?

Yes, the SSP Program 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 831-454-2160** 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 831-454-2022** 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 Service Programs can be found here:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:

www.cdc.gov/ssp/index.html

California Department of Public Health website:

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