

A PRESCRIPTION FOR CHANGE

HOW IMPROPERLY STORED AND DISPOSED MEDS AFFECT OUR COMMUNITY HEALTH



NEW SOLUTIONS FOR A GROWING PROBLEM

Prescription medications around the home pose risks, but San Mateo County has taken action

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

Prescription medication can save lives, but it can also take lives. Overdoses and accidental poisonings are just two tragic consequences of the national drug epidemic that includes San Mateo County.

The use of prescription medication is on the rise. This leads to a lot of pills in household medicine cabinets, easily accessed by anyone: unsuspecting children, curious teens or burglars who sell drugs on the street. A 2015 survey indicated that 27 percent of county residents polled keep prescription medications in an unsecured medicine cabinet. Some officials worry that improperly stored medications can

contribute to the growing problem of prescription medication abuse.

In addition to improper storage of medications, many people don't know how to safely dispose of leftover medications when they're no longer needed. Throwing leftover pills in the trash, or flushing them down the drain or toilet, may have negative environmental and public health consequences.

San Mateo County is addressing this serious problem head-on. The Board of

Supervisors recently passed a new ordinance calling for manufacturers of medication sold in the county to help expand options for free, safe disposal of medication in our communities. This will help get unneeded medication out of the home and help protect your family from potential harm.

Read on to find out more about the consequences of improper storage and disposal of medication, and learn how you can help keep your family and our community safe.



PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE TAKES A TOLL IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

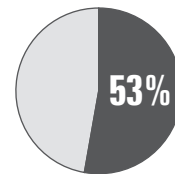
Prescription medication abuse is a serious issue in San Mateo County. Safely store and dispose of your meds to keep them out of the wrong hands.



In 2014,
53 PEOPLE DIED
from an accidental drug
overdose.



There were
**432 UNINTENTIONAL
DEATHS** from
prescription medication
from 1990-2010.



53% of
**ALL UNINTENTIONAL
DEATHS**
in the county from
1990-2010 were caused
by overdose.



151 PEOPLE
in the county were
discharged from the
hospital for accidental
poisoning by drugs,
medicinal substances
and biologicals in 2010.

Sources: San Mateo County death certificates from 1990-2010, hospitalization discharge data from the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

THE THREAT TO OUR COMMUNITY

What do the professionals say? BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

National trends indicate that the abuse of prescription drugs is on the rise. Diana Hill, Supervisor for San Mateo County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, says the anxiety drug Xanax is popular locally among teens.

“Xanax bars are meant to be split into four separate doses,” Hill explains. “Youth often take the entire Xanax bar at once.”

This type of abuse of prescription medication can cause dangerous side effects as well as addiction.

“Overall, use of these drugs is rising,” Hill says. “Medications left unused and unmonitored in medicine cabinets are very easily stolen by youth or a guest.”



PRESCRIPTION FOR CRIME

Unsecured prescription medications in your medicine cabinet may make your home a target for criminals.

“Much like with the abuse of illegal drugs, we often see other crimes motivated by illicit prescription drug addiction, including theft, burglary or even robbery,” says San Mateo County Sheriff Greg Munks. “Narcotic investigators have seized weapons from dealers of prescription drugs ... and have seen a recent rise in pharmacy thefts, thefts of prescription pads and other fraudulent ways to obtain prescription

medication. Also, as is the case statewide, locally we have seen a rise in impaired driving as a result of prescription drugs.”

Authorities identify medication abuse as the fastest-growing drug problem in the nation.



WHAT'S IN THE WATER?

When it comes to medication, don't flush. Disposing of unused medication via the toilet or the sink creates problems downstream, since water treatment plants aren't designed to handle these sophisticated chemical compounds.

Brian Schumacker, plant Superintendent for South San Francisco and San Bruno Water Control, says the State has not yet established water-purity standards for medication levels since “it's such a new concern.” Schumacker says it's difficult to accurately measure the impact of water-soluble medications, but scientists are studying the problem.

There are many unknowns when it comes to medication in water, but pollution prevention is the least costly option.



ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE

In most households, medication is stored in cabinets or drawers that are easy to access. Convenience carries risk — patients can easily access their meds, but so can anyone else. Children who discover pills may accidentally poison themselves. Curious pets may also gobble up pills tossed in the trash and suffer overdose. Securing medications in the home and disposing of them securely at the County's official collection locations is the best way to avert tragedy. See back page for disposal locations.



IMPACT OF ADDICTION HITS HOME

Preventing prescription medication abuse in youth and teens

BY BRITTANY WESELY



"We need to be more involved in limiting access."

Mary Bier
Prevention Specialist at North County
Prevention Partnership

Mary Bier understands firsthand the devastating impact of the abuse of prescription medication. She recalls the pain of watching the struggle of many people in her family, including one family member who accessed a parent's prescription medication at age 10 and has struggled with addiction ever since.

"It was painful for me to watch as a young girl," Bier says. "The disease of addiction has been hard for my family member to battle and it remains a constant struggle."

Today Bier applies her personal history to her job as a Prevention Specialist at North County Prevention Partnership, a nonprofit focused on reducing the impact of drugs and alcohol in the community.

"Recreational use of prescription drugs is such a big deal on our [school] campuses right now, even more so than it was five years ago," Bier says.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, three out of four drug overdoses are caused by prescription painkillers. In 2011, the CDC declared prescription drug abuse an epidemic

and the White House defined it as "the nation's fastest growing drug problem."

Misuse of prescription drugs is becoming more prevalent due to a rise in accessibility, according to Bier. A 2014 study by Monitoring the Future reported that more than 40 percent of 12th-graders nationwide say that it is "very easy" to get access to controlled medications.

Bier has worked with many San Mateo County youth whose recreational use of prescription medication has taken a toll, like a group of local 11th-graders who were recently nearly expelled for using pills at school.

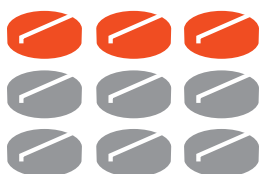
"A lot of parents don't think about locking up or properly disposing of prescriptions because it's not something they're used to doing," Bier says. "We need to be more involved in limiting access."

Bier recommends that parents keep prescription medications locked up at home and properly dispose of unneeded medications at secure collection locations.

Resources for parents are available through San Mateo County's Behavioral Health and Recovery Services. To find out more, call the ACCESS Call Center at 800-686-0101 or visit <http://smchealth.org/bhrs/>.

TEENS AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

1/3 of teens believe it's **OK** to use prescription drugs that were **NOT PRESCRIBED** to them.



43% of teens say prescription drugs are **EASIER TO GET** than illegal drugs.



More than **4 IN 10** teens who have misused or abused a prescription drug **GOT IT FROM A PARENT'S MEDICINE CABINET**.



1 IN 5 kids who have misused or abused a prescription drug **STARTED BEFORE AGE 14**.

Source: The Partnership at Drugfree.org, www.drugfree.org/MedicineAbuseProject

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ADOPTS ORDINANCE TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO **SAFE MEDICINE DISPOSAL**

Medication manufacturers will share responsibility

BY EVAN TUCHINSKY

A new San Mateo County ordinance is aimed at helping make our communities safer by expanding the public's access to disposal sites for unwanted medication.

San Mateo County has long been on the vanguard of this issue. County Supervisor Adrienne Tissier initiated the County's prescription medication take-back program at law enforcement agencies in 2006, one of the first of its kind in the nation.

However, a 2015 survey of about 1,800 county residents revealed that 38 percent still throw unneeded medicines in the trash or toilet, and 27 percent store them in a medicine cabinet.

Addressing this concern, the Board of Supervisors recently approved the Safe Medicine Disposal ordinance. The goal of the ordinance is to increase the number of sites that can securely take unused or expired drugs, "thus providing greater convenience to

the public," according to Waymond Wong, Pollution Prevention Program Supervisor for the County's Environmental Health Division.

The ordinance followed the proven concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), a policy approach that involves manufacturers of goods in the financial and operational responsibility for product disposal. Taxpayers have traditionally assumed all costs for the disposal of manufactured goods.

"It is important for the producers to be part of the solution to the growing public health and environmental problems associated with improper medication disposal," explains Wong.

The San Mateo County ordinance was built on previously adopted ordinances in San Francisco and Alameda County. The new, expanded collection program is expected to start around January 2017. Collection options have yet to be determined.



Sheriff Greg Munks and County Supervisor Adrienne Tissier both support the recently approved Safe Medicine Disposal ordinance.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SAN MATEO COUNTY

POSSIBLE FUTURE COLLECTION OPTIONS INCLUDE:



**MAIL-BACK
PROGRAM**



**SECURE
DISPOSAL
BINS IN:**



PHARMACIES



**LAW
ENFORCEMENT
AGENCIES**



HOSPITALS

Top: SINGREM, Mexico's producer-funded pharmaceutical collection program, collected and safely disposed of more than 420,000 kilograms of drug waste in 2014.

Bottom: SINGREM places secure collection containers in pharmacies for consumer convenience.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOSE ANTONIO AEDO



LEADING THE WAY

Mexico offers model of successful producer-funded pharmaceutical disposal program

BY ALYSSA NOELLE RASMUSSEN

For years, San Mateo County has operated a successful pharmaceutical disposal program, disposing of more than 76 tons of medication. The newly adopted Safe Medicine Disposal ordinance will expand the collection program with funding from pharmaceutical manufacturers.

Will it work? A look at what Mexico has done in recent years with similar regulations offers a promising outlook for how the program might be expanded in San Mateo County.

Jose Antonio Aedo is the General Manager of SINGREM, a Spanish acronym for the National Management System for Drug and Packaging Waste. SINGREM is Mexico's Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) collection program for pharmaceuticals. The nonprofit group, founded in 2007, is organized and funded by pharmaceutical manufacturers to administer the collection and disposal of unused prescription drugs.

To support the program, all manufacturers contribute funding in

proportion to the number of units they sell. Manufacturers pay just 1.5 to 3 Mexican cents per unit to fund the program, says Aedo, and the program costs nothing to consumers and participating pharmacies that host the containers.

“With containers in the large pharmacy chains, it’s easy to find a place to drop off these expired or leftover products.”

Jose Antonio Aedo
General Manager of SINGREM

“Almost everything we receive goes to containers, transport and destruction. The administrative costs are less than 10 percent of the program,” Aedo says. “We strive to be highly efficient.”

Today SINGREM has 3,739 containers conveniently located in pharmacies throughout 24 of Mexico’s

31 states. Public awareness and participation has been steadily on the rise. More than 420,000 kilograms of drug waste was collected last year, up from 8,000 kilograms just four years prior.

“Manufacturers, pharmacies, and consumers are increasingly more aware of the significance of leftover medications, given that, in Mexico, they are taken out of the trash and sold illegally or they contaminate the land and water,” Aedo says. “There is more environmental awareness. Moreover, with containers in the large pharmacy chains, it’s easy to find a place to drop off these expired or leftover products.”



MANAGE YOUR MEDS THE SAFE WAY

It's important to store medications securely while they're in use, and dispose of leftover or expired medications quickly and safely. Here's how:



Store meds safely

- Store medicines out of reach of children or pets.
- Ask your pharmacist if any of your prescriptions are at risk for abuse.
- Lock up medications.
- Keep an updated inventory of all prescription medicine in your home.
- Pay attention to unexpected changes in pill quantities.

Dispose of meds safely

1 CHECK TO SEE IF YOUR ITEMS ARE ACCEPTED:



Accepted:

- Over-the-counter and prescription medications, including controlled substances
- Medicated ointments, lotions and creams
- Liquid medication
- Pet medication

Not Accepted:

- Sharps/needles
- IV bags
- Waste containing blood or infectious material
- Personal care products
- Empty pill containers
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Aerosol cans



2 PREP YOUR MEDS.



- Dump unneeded pills into plastic baggies. It's OK to use one bag for different types of pills.
- Peel off or black out the labels on pill containers and recycle the containers at home.
- Keep liquids, creams and gels in original packaging.

3 DROP OFF MEDS!



Approved San Mateo County drop-off locations can be found at smchealth.org/RxDisposal.

Don't flush or throw medications in the trash.



TAKE IT BACK. DON'T TRASH OR FLUSH!



Safely dispose of prescription medications, including controlled substances,
at the following locations:

Belmont

Belmont Police Department
1 Twin Pines Lane
650-595-7400

Brisbane

Brisbane Police Department
50 Park Place
415-467-1212

Burlingame

Burlingame Police Department
1111 Trousdale Drive
650-777-4100

Daly City

Daly City Police Department
333 90th St.
650-991-8119

Half Moon Bay

San Mateo County Sheriff's Office
537 Kelly Ave.
650-726-8288

Hillsborough

Hillsborough Police Department
1600 Floribunda Ave.
650-375-7400

Millbrae

San Mateo County Sheriff's Office
Millbrae Police Bureau
581 Magnolia Ave.
650-259-2300

Moss Beach

San Mateo County Sheriff's Office
500 California Ave.
650-573-2801

Pacifica

Pacifica Police Department
2075 Coast Highway
650-738-7314

Redwood City

San Mateo County Sheriff's Office
400 County Center, Third Floor
650-599-1536

San Bruno

San Bruno Police Department
1117 Huntington Ave.
650-616-7100

San Carlos

San Mateo County Sheriff's Office
San Carlos Police Bureau
600 Elm St.
650-802-4277

San Mateo

San Mateo Police Department
200 Franklin Parkway
650-522-7710

South San Francisco

South San Francisco Police Department
33 Arroyo Drive, Suite C
650-877-8900



*Call for access hours and capacity

Check the website often
SMC^{HEALTH}.ORG/RXDISPOSAL
for new locations!

If you have other questions, call 650-372-6200.

