



Maryland's Office of Overdose Response

Syringe Services Programs: Resources for Law Enforcement Officers

What are Syringe Services Programs?

Syringe Services Programs (SSPs) provide tools for the prevention and reversal of overdose and a wide range of other health services, including linkage to treatment, wound care, fentanyl and xylazine test strips, testing for Hepatitis C and HIV, and infectious disease prevention by distributing sterile use equipment to participants. Sterile-use equipment can include syringes, caps/cookers, cottons, smoking devices, safe snorting supplies, and ties. In Maryland, individuals cannot be arrested, charged, or prosecuted for possessing syringes and other paraphernalia used for safe use obtained through an approved SSP.

Maryland Law

Health-General § 24–901 through § 24–909 authorizes Syringe Services Programs within Maryland. This statute protects participants everywhere within the State of Maryland. These statutory protections are not limited to the jurisdiction where the individual receives services. Health-General § 24-908 explicitly states:

(a) A Program staff member, Program volunteer, or Program participant may not be arrested, charged, or prosecuted for violating § 5-601, § 5-619, § 5-620, or § 5-902(c) or (d) of the Criminal Law Article for possessing or distributing controlled paraphernalia or drug paraphernalia whenever the possession or distribution of the controlled paraphernalia or drug paraphernalia is a direct result of the employee's, volunteer's, or participant's activities in connection with the work of a Program authorized under this subtitle.

Why do we have SSPs?

Studies show that SSPs make communities safer in a myriad of ways.¹

- SSPs reduce needlestick injuries, a common safety concern for first responders, by offering proper sharps disposal.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/index.html>

- Overdose deaths are reduced by offering and training participants in how to use the overdose reversal drug, naloxone.
- Increasing access to sterile needles and syringes reduces needle sharing, which in turn reduces the spread of HIV and viral Hepatitis in communities.
- Reduction in infectious disease saves lives and long-term health care expenses.
- SSPs serve as a touch point for services for people who use drugs, demonstrated by the fact that participants enrolling in an SSP are 5 times more likely to enter treatment and 3.5 times more likely to stop injecting drugs.

Some SSPs in Maryland participate in the [Rapid Analysis of Drugs \(RAD\)](#) program. This program is administered by the Maryland Department of Health Center for Harm Reduction Services in collaboration with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). RAD testing provides detailed analysis of samples obtained through swabbing paraphernalia voluntarily provided by SSP participants. Results from RAD testing enable SSPs to share critical information with participants regarding the substances they use while also providing policymakers in Maryland with keen insights regarding the illicit drug supply in the state. RAD is a state-approved program activity, thus the possession of paraphernalia is approved for registered SSP participants. Participating SSPs have been trained by NIST to collect swab samples from relinquished paraphernalia (e.g., syringes, pipes, straws, baggies, etc.) to send to the lab for testing.

How does law enforcement know if someone is participating in a program?

- Per the regulations set forth in [COMAR 10.52.01](#):
 - Each program participant will be issued an identification card with a unique identification number, which may not be cross-indexed to any personal identifying data on the participant.
 - Identification cards contain contact information for the SSP the person is registered with
- As participation in a syringe services program is confidential, the card must serve as sufficient proof of participation.
- There is no cost or barrier to participation in an SSP, which removes any incentive to counterfeit or unlawfully procure an identification card.

For a list of approved SSPs in Maryland please visit
<https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/Pages/Syringe-Services-Program.aspx>

For questions about SSPs and participant protections please contact
mdh.syringeservices@maryland.gov