

Alameda County LEADS THE WAY



Join members from across our community who are working together to reduce demand for prescription medications and dispose of them safely

Back row from left: Doug Dattawalker, Union Sanitary District; Sgt. Bret Scheuller, Alameda County Sheriff's Office; Nate Miley, Alameda County Supervisor – District 4. Center from left: Audrey Comeaux, East Bay Municipal Utility District; Elsa Casanova, Ashland Cherryland Together; Naomi Lue, Castro Valley Sanitary District. Seated front from left: Bob Swanson; and Pauline Von Stetten, MEDS Coalition member.

PHOTO BY KATE HOLTZEN

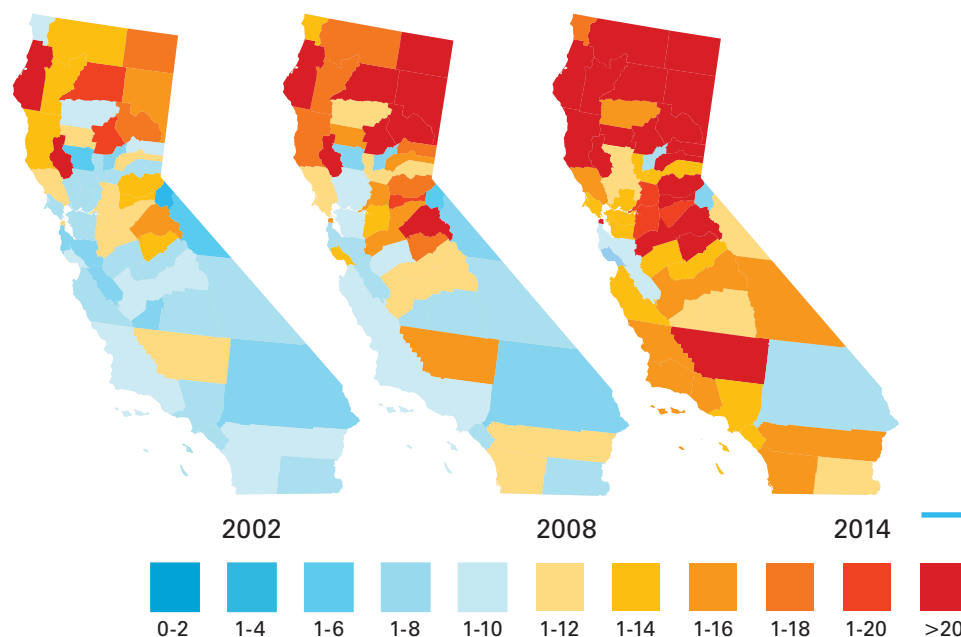


The PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION PROBLEM:

It's growing, but it can be solved

BY ANNE STOKES

Estimated Age-Adjusted Death Rate for Drug Poisoning (prescription and illegal drugs) per 100,000¹



In Alameda County, prescription drug overdose deaths have tripled between 2005 and 2014.

"We're seeing it in the field, we're seeing people come in the emergency room, we're seeing people in the hospital and we're seeing people in the morgue," says Dr. Kathleen Clanon, medical director of Health Care Service Agency of Alameda County.

Prescription medications have the power to make our lives better. It's easy to see why nearly half of Americans take one or more prescription drugs, according to the CDC. But the abundance of pills in our community has created a problem with dire consequences. In 2012, Alameda County passed an ordinance to remove unwanted medications from our community quickly through convenient and safe take-back programs paid for by pharmaceutical companies, as they already do in Canada and Mexico.

Another ordinance makes sure medical needles, or sharps, are properly disposed. Together, the ordinances and other efforts in Alameda County are addressing an issue that affects us all in the following ways:

Rx meds fuel addiction and crime

A 2015 CDC study found that misuse of prescription opioid painkillers, such as Vicodin and OxyContin, is the strongest risk factor for future heroin abuse. According to Sgt. Bret Scheuller of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office, addicts often commit property crimes, such as home and auto burglaries, in order to support drug habits. Sometimes the pills themselves are stolen because they can yield \$25 each on the street.

"Addicts come from all walks of life and if they know that there's pills in a medicine cabinet, they're going to go there," Scheuller says.

Rx meds contribute to accidental overdoses

In 2014, 34 children under the age of 12 in Alameda County were taken to emergency rooms for accidental poisoning, according to data from the California Office of Statewide Health Planning & Development. Having unused medications stockpiled at home can lead to accidental overdoses. Seniors, especially those who take many medications, are susceptible to taking duplicate doses. Curious young children may ingest medications that could look to them like candy. Accidental medication overdose is the leading cause of children's poisoning in the U.S., according to a report by Safe Kids Worldwide.

Rx meds harm the environment

Throwing unused medications and sharps into the trash, recycling or toilet can contaminate the environment and pose a potential threat to humans and wildlife. Wastewater treatment plants aren't capable of removing the chemicals and sanitation workers can be stuck by sharps while sorting trash.

"Anytime you have pharmaceutical compounds in the drinking water, it's a foreign contaminant that pollutes our drinking water supply," says Audrey Comeaux, wastewater control representative with East Bay Municipal Utility District.

The dangers of too many pills

1,870

NONFATAL EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS IN 2014

were attributed to prescription opioid pharmaceuticals in Alameda County².

258 people

in Alameda County died from opioid overdoses from 2009-2014³.



3 out of 4

NEW HEROIN USERS

report having abused prescription opioids prior to using heroin⁴.

56%

of Alameda County residents had opioid prescriptions in 2013⁵.

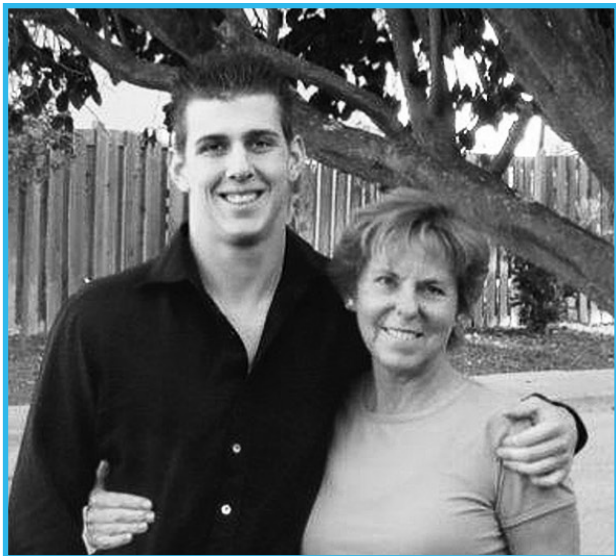


44 people

die every day in the U.S. from overdoses of prescription narcotics such as OxyContin and Vicodin⁶.

SOURCES: 1 - CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, mortality data and Health Indicators Warehouse; 2 - Office of Statewide Health Planning & Development (OSHPD) Emergency Department Files, ICD-9 codes for Opioid abuse, dependence, poisoning; 3 - Opioid Deaths: CDC Wonder, Multiple Cause of Death; 4 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/heroin.html) ; 5 - CURES, California's prescription drug monitoring program; 6 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Vital Statistics System mortality data (2015).

April Rovero founded The National Coalition Against Prescription Drug Abuse after her son, Joey (at left), died of an accidental pharmaceutical overdose in 2009. PHOTO COURTESY OF APRIL ROVERO



A Threat Facing EVERY FAMILY

Prescription drug accessibility
can lead to tragedy

BY KATE GONZALES

April Rovero's son, Joey, was an exceptional athlete and a friendly, easygoing kid. She never suspected he'd fall victim to drugs. Pills and partying were part of the culture that surrounded Joey at college. He confided in his mother that his roommates were abusing prescription meds and struggling to pay their share of rent. Yet the day before he was due home for Christmas break, Joey died from an accidental drug overdose.

"We couldn't have been more shocked," Rovero says. "If this could happen to our family, it really could happen to anyone in America."

A sense of duty followed the initial grief, and in 2010 the family formed The National Coalition Against Prescription Drug Abuse (www.ncapda.org), a nonprofit that educates people on the dangers of prescription opioids and advocates for solutions.

Joey's death has drawn national attention. The doctor who prescribed the drugs that killed him was sentenced to 30 years to life in prison for the second-degree murder of Joey and two others. Rovero hopes it is a wake-up call, not just for unprofessional doctors, but for any doctor who doesn't fully understand the potential dangers of overprescribing opioids.

"No sentencing can ever bring our son back," she says.

The work she and others are doing around education and implementation of more thoughtful prescription standards is helping put an end to this tragic pattern.

Working toward a solution

A grassroots effort is underway to address overprescribing at its source in Alameda County. Primary care physicians, specialists, pharmacists, dentists, hospitals, community clinics and affected community members are working collaboratively to reduce opioid misuse. Through the efforts of the Alameda County Safety Net Working Group on Opioid Prescribing and the East Bay Safe

Prescribing Coalition (www.EastBaySafeRx.org), the local medical community is promoting evidence-based guidelines and implementing best practices. The goal is to encourage safe and appropriate pain management practices and reduce the number of painkillers in Alameda County.

**"If this could happen
to our family, it really
could happen to anyone
in America."**

APRIL ROVERO
**Founder, National Coalition Against
Prescription Drug Abuse**

"Reducing the risk of opioid overdose and dependence is going to require a sustained collaborative effort, including from the medical community," says Dr. Tom Sugarman, co-chair of the East Bay Safe Prescribing Coalition, whose work has resulted in almost all Alameda County emergency departments voluntarily adopting safe prescribing guidelines. "Our efforts are starting to make a difference, but there is more we can do. Everyone has a role to play, and it will take a community effort."

For Kelly Densmore, witnessing her son's struggle with addiction was all the motivation she needed to do something.

She founded Mothers with a Purpose (www.motherswithapurpose.org), a Pleasanton organization working to educate the community about this widespread problem.

"The awareness of addiction in our country is lacking, severely," Densmore says. "We're losing way too many kids."

Thinking past the pill

What are opioids?

Opioids are prescription medications that help relieve pain, such as hydrocodone (Vicodin, Norco), oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet) and morphine. They can manage pain but also be addictive.

What are alternatives to opioids?

- Acupuncture
- Massage
- Exercise or stretching
- Physical therapy
- Rehabilitation
- Relaxation training
- Meditation
- Chiropractic
- Yoga
- Non-opioid pain meds

What are the signs of opioid use disorder?

- Taking increased amounts (prescribed dose no longer works)
- Feeling anxious or physically ill when unable to access opioids
- Use in potentially dangerous situations, like driving
- Use despite negative impacts to work, friends or family

Opiate addiction treatment resources

Alameda County ACCESS line
1-800-491-9099

BAART Programs
510-533-0800

Berkeley Addiction Treatment Services
510-644-0200

C.U.R.A.
510-713-3202

Get help - call today!

Coming Together to [SOLVE THE PROBLEM]

Local groups work to prevent misuse of meds by kids and seniors

BY KATE GONZALES

Alameda County is on the front line in fighting the dangers of pharmaceuticals, with a group of individuals and organizations working together to educate at-risk populations on the misuse of medications. That group is known as the Alameda County Medication Education Disposal Safety (MEDS) Coalition.

"We're trying to think about the whole life of a pill and where are the different places along the life of the pill that we can intervene," says Dr. Kathleen Clanon, a member of the coalition and the medical director of Health Care Services Agency of Alameda County.

One of the coalition's most powerful tools to prevent prescription medication misuse is education. Although everyone would benefit from knowing more about this problem, two Alameda programs are focusing on the most vulnerable populations: youth and older adults.

At Eden Youth and Family Center in Hayward, one effort is changing young peoples' attitudes around taking medication.

"This problem is in all communities. It affects the young to the old and hits people of every ethnicity and economic status. We can all benefit from education and action on opioids."

PASTOR RAYMOND LANKFORD
Voices of Hope Community

According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, as many as one in four teens has reported using a prescription drug that wasn't prescribed to them. And getting those drugs is easy — 42 percent of those teens who misused or abused prescription medications obtained meds from their parents' medicine cabinets. These trends have tragic consequences: Prescription drug overdose has now surpassed vehicle accidents as the No. 1 accidental cause of death in the U.S.

"Having an overabundance in the home causes this feeling of comfort around these drugs and the sense that they're OK," says Thania Balcorta, program manager for Eden Youth and Family Center.



A youth advisory council called Make Your Mark gives young people in Hayward an opportunity to discuss how to prevent prescription drug misuse.

PHOTO BY BJ MARTIN

With grant funding, Balcorta facilitates Make Your Mark, a youth advisory council of around 30 youth who gather weekly to brainstorm ways to change the conversation around drugs. In February 2016, council members met with peers and legislators in Washington, D.C. to learn about and advocate for drug abuse prevention.

Seniors are another at-risk group. Miriam Rabinovitz, Alameda County Senior Injury Prevention Coordinator, says seniors who mix or are overprescribed medications are at increased risk of falls, car accidents and other harm. They can also be victimized by criminals looking to steal stockpiles of unused pills.

Alameda County partners with care centers and service providers to educate seniors countywide through its Medication Management Safety pilot program. They offer tips to seniors and caregivers, such as building a relationship with one pharmacist so he or she can flag concerns about prescriptions. They also provide seniors with a list of questions to ask their primary care providers about medications.

The County also initiated a peer-to-peer program, training members of United Seniors of Oakland and Alameda County in basic medication management.

"Peer-to-peer training is effective because there is a built-in trust," Rabinovitz says. "It also provides an opportunity for empowerment, where older adults can feel useful when they are empowered with information to teach others."

What is the Alameda County MEDS Coalition?

The MEDS Coalition aims to reduce and prevent medication misuse for older adults and youth and to reduce harm to our natural environment.

The coalition was formed to address multiple issues leading to prescription drug abuse and was instrumental in the creation/passage of the Safe Drug Disposal Ordinance, which requires pharmaceutical manufacturers to create a drug take-back program. The coalition continues to be a link between stakeholders and the general public, and meets monthly to continue its efforts.

Current members:

Alameda County Environmental Health Department

Alameda County older adult residents

Alameda County Pharmacists Association

Alameda County Senior Injury Prevention Partnership

Alameda County Sheriff's Office

Alameda County Supervisor Nate Miley

Alameda County Water Districts

Alameda Health Care Services Agency

Ashland-Cherryland Together

Castro Valley Community Action Network

Castro Valley Sanitary District

Davis Street Family Resource Center

East Bay Municipal Utility District

Eden Medical Center

Eden Township Healthcare District

National Coalition Against Prescription Drug Abuse

Teleosis Institute

Union Sanitary District

United Seniors of Oakland and Alameda County

Want to support the coalition?

Visit www.acgov.org/medscoalition or call 510-272-6694.



A STICKING POINT

Waste Management of Alameda County Inc. employee Victoria Leon was stuck by a medical needle while sorting trash in 2013. Proper disposal of needles (also called sharps) into designated plastic containers would prevent injuries to waste management workers like Leon.
PHOTO BY KATE HOLTZEN



"I have a husband and two kids. If something were to go wrong, how would I be able to take care of them?"

VICTORIA LEON
Waste Management of Alameda County Inc. employee

Waste management employee stuck by medical needle on the job

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Victoria Leon loves her job. As a sorter at Waste Management of Alameda County Inc. Davis Street Resource Recovery Complex in San Leandro, she goes through hundreds of pounds of recyclables to remove trash. But in 2013, Leon had a scare that could have changed her life forever — she was stuck by a medical needle that had been thrown in the trash.

Leon, now 35, remembers the day well. She had sorted through more than 200 pounds of material when she reached into a pile to

grab a plastic bag. What she didn't know at the time was the bag was full of improperly disposed needles, also called sharps. When she reached inside, one punctured her right index finger. Leon was terrified and rushed to tell her supervisor what happened.

"I was thinking I could have contracted HIV or some other disease," Leon says. "It was very scary. When something like that happens, lots of things go through your mind. I have a husband and

two kids. If something were to go wrong, how would I be able to take care of them?"

Leon's supervisor took her to an emergency room. She had her blood drawn and tested. Luckily, the results came back negative for any diseases. But she wasn't in the clear yet. Doctors told her because some diseases take time to develop, she would need to come back to the hospital once a month for six months to be tested.

Each test that came back negative was encouraging to Leon, but she still had that worry in the back of her mind. Only after half a year had gone by did she finally begin to feel some relief.

"When everything came back negative after six months, I was so happy that I didn't have anything," Leon says. "But I couldn't help but think how it could have all been avoided if people disposed of their needles correctly."

You can safely dispose of your needles with Waste Management's MedWaste Tracker™, a mail return system that provides you with a plastic collection container with pre-paid postage that you can mail back to the company once filled. Visit www.wm.com/residential/medical-waste.jsp for more information.

The RIGHT way to dispose of needles

Improper disposal of medical needles can harm people — and it's illegal in California. Many users just don't have a convenient way to get rid of the needles, also referred to as sharps. That's why Alameda County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance requiring sharps manufacturers to create a collection program for used sharps by September 2016. Until a program is implemented, there are two ways you can dispose of sharps waste in Alameda County:



Purchase a plastic sharps container. Rigid plastic sharps containers are available in stores and online. Some containers come with prepaid mail-back boxes while some, like UltiCare's UltiGuard Safe Pack, come packaged for sale in a safe return container. Visit ulticare.com for more information.

Dispose at an HHW facility. You can dispose of your sharps for free by dropping them off at Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) facilities in Alameda County (see back page for addresses):

- Fremont
- Hayward
- Livermore
- Oakland

The Solution Starts With **YOU**

Responsible actions you can take to keep our communities safe

BY ANNE STOKES

The root of the prescription drug abuse problem is from a seemingly harmless source: your own medicine cabinet. That's why each and every one of us needs to be part of the solution. Here are things you can do to reduce the need for opioids, responsibly store them and properly dispose of them:

✓ **Talk to your health care provider and pharmacist**

Ask your health care provider about the risks with painkillers and alternatives to opioids (such as acupuncture, relaxation or over-the-counter pain relievers). Find out if you need opioids and if so, how often and how long to take them. Some patients find it harder to get off of opioids if they are taken longer than 90 days.

✓ **Get only the amount you think you'll need**

Make sure your prescription will cover your pain management needs. If you do not believe you need the entire prescription, tell your doctor and/or have your pharmacist fill only a portion of your prescription, and then return for the rest later if you need it.

✓ **Request compliance packs**

Also known as "bubble" packs, prescriptions can be prepackaged into daily regimens, reducing the chance of duplicate, missed or lost doses. If your pharmacy can't customize your prescription packaging, medi-sets are helpful tools for patients and caregivers.



Dr. Pam Gumbs, owner of United Pharmacy in Berkeley, suggests patients ask for "bubble" packs to reduce the risk of taking the wrong dose. United Pharmacy is one location where Alameda County residents can safely dispose of unused or expired medications. PHOTO BY KATE HOLTZEN

✓ **Lock up your meds**

A locked safe makes a less tempting target for theft and keeps medications out of the reach of young children and teens. "It's fairly common that people's medicine cabinets get raided. It might be your kids, their friends, or people who come into the house as guests," says Sgt. Bret Scheuller of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office. "Lock up your medications."

✓ **Educate your family and caregivers**

Make sure teens are aware that prescription drugs are only to be used as prescribed, and can be just as harmful as illegal drugs. More than four in 10 teens (42 percent) who have misused or abused a prescription drug obtained it from a parent's medicine cabinet, according to a survey from the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids. Make sure all caregivers are aware of proper dosage and safe storage.

✓ **Safely dispose of medications**

With dozens of locations throughout Alameda County, take-back bins are the best way to dispose of unwanted and expired medications from home. There are two locations that accept controlled medicines and several that accept non-controlled medications, and more are being added all the time (see www.acgov.org/aceh/safedisposal for the current list). Other businesses are stepping up. Walgreens has recently announced that it will install 500 safe disposal kiosks in pharmacies in 39 states, including California.

✓ **Ask your pharmacist to host a take-back bin**

Talk to your local pharmacy, doctor's office or veterinarian about hosting a pharmaceutical take-back bin and be sure to patronize businesses that do. "You can say 'I'm tired of going somewhere else to drop off my pills. I'd like to do everything right here with you,'" says Dr. Pam Gumbs, owner of United Pharmacy in Berkeley, which hosts a take-back bin.

A Model of SUCCESS

The long road that led to Alameda County's medication take-back ordinance

BY KATE GONZALES



District 4 Supervisor Nate Miley spearheaded the effort to create and pass the county's Safe Drug Disposal Ordinance — the first of its kind to be adopted in the nation.
PHOTO BY KATE HOLTZEN

The work done by Alameda County to pass a Safe Drug Disposal Ordinance goes beyond protecting its own residents' health and well-being — it has paved the way for other counties to do the same.

The path to the country's first drug disposal ordinance, which requires pharmaceutical manufacturers to design, fund and implement a countywide take-back program for unwanted medications, was a long one. In the absence of state and federal regulations around medication disposal, District 4 Supervisor Nate Miley, the Alameda County Medication Education Disposal Safety (MEDS) Coalition and others looked at models in other countries, like Canada.

The ordinance is an example of extended producer responsibility (EPR) — making pharmaceutical manufacturers responsible for the end-of-life disposal of their products. Considering the nearly \$1 billion in annual pharmaceutical sales in Alameda County, Miley says funding a take-back program would cost pennies.

"We just wanted to make sure that the cost is borne by the pharmaceutical industry and not the consumer," he says.

In June 2012, the county was the first in the nation to adopt an EPR ordinance for safe disposal of drugs, with a unanimous vote of the Board of Supervisors. That December, Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) and two other pharmaceutical trade associations (Generic Pharmaceutical Association and Biotechnology Industry Association) challenged the constitutionality of the ordinance, stating

it interfered with interstate commerce and discriminated against drug makers from outside Alameda County. In 2013, the Federal District Court upheld the ordinance, as did the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals the following year. PhRMA tried to take it to the U.S. Supreme Court, which, in May 2015, declined to hear the appeal.

"I'm proud to say that at every stage of that litigation we were successful," says County Counsel Donna R. Ziegler, adding that the long battle to protect residents' health and safety showed the county's grit.

"One thing it says about Alameda County is that we have courageous leadership," she says.

Now, the pharmaceutical companies' plan has been approved by the county's Department of Environmental Health, which will oversee implementation. The first phase includes installing take-back bins at law enforcement sites and organizing take-back events. Alameda County MEDS Coalition will continue its education and outreach efforts pertaining to prescription drugs.

Supervisor Miley is proud that San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Marin and Santa Cruz counties have all unanimously passed similar ordinances, and

he hopes more counties across the state and nation will follow. Thanks to the work done in Alameda County, counties including Santa Barbara and Los Angeles have introduced similar ordinances.

"We're delighted that our ordinance is [becoming] the law of the land," says Miley.

"We just wanted to make sure that the cost is borne by the pharmaceutical industry and not the consumer."

NATE MILEY
Alameda County District 4 Supervisor

Connect with us

Alameda County MEDS Coalition has just launched its Safe Drug Disposal website, giving residents a tool to stay updated on the implementation of this program.

At www.acgov.org/medscoalition, you can find:



How to follow the coalition on Twitter (@AlCoSafeMeds)



The coalition's Facebook page (facebook.com/AlamedaSafeMeds)



Resources, including ways to prevent prescription drug abuse and poisoning



A map of medication take-back sites



A timeline of the history of the ordinance, and links to related articles



A calendar of coalition meetings and events

www.acgov.org/medscoalition

Together, we can MAKE ALAMEDA COUNTY SAFER

The responsible use and disposal of prescription drugs and needles can prevent tragedies and save lives.

DO YOUR PART!

Reduce the
need for
medications.

Responsibly
use and store
medications
and needles.


Properly
dispose of
unwanted
medications
and needles.

For more information, visit:
www.acgov.org/medscoalition

Medication/Needle Drop-Off Locations

Please call ahead to check hours of operation for facilities that do not have hours listed here. **Disposal questions? Call 1-800-606-6606.**

Alameda

 **Alameda Police Department**
1555 Oak St.
510-337-8340
Daily 8 a.m.-8 p.m.

Berkeley

United Pharmacy
2929 Telegraph Ave.
510-843-3201

Castro Valley

Eden Medical Center
20103 Lake Chabot Road
(Emergency Entrance)
510-537-1234

Fremont

 **City of Fremont
Household Hazardous Waste
Drop-Off Site**
(For Alameda County residents only)
41149 Boyce Road
1-800-606-6606

Haller's Pharmacy and Medical Supply
37323 Fremont Blvd.
510-797-2772

**Washington Township Medical Foundation
Warm Springs Clinic**
46690 Mohave Drive
510-248-1065

**Washington Hospital Community
Health Resource Library**
2500 Mowry Ave. Ste. 100
510-494-7030


Washington Hospital Main Lobby
2000 Mowry Ave.
510-797-1111

Hayward

 **Alameda County
Household Hazardous Waste
Drop-Off Site - Hayward**
(For Alameda County residents only)
2091 W. Winton Ave.
1-800-606-6606

Ted's Drugs
27453 Hesperian Blvd.
510-782-6494

Livermore

 **Alameda County Household Hazardous Waste
Drop-Off Site - Livermore**
(For Alameda County residents only)
5584 La Ribera St.
1-800-606-6606

Newark

Haller's Pharmacy Newark
6170 Thornton Ave. Ste. E
510-797-4333

Oakland

 **Alameda County
Household Hazardous Waste
Drop-Off Site - Oakland**
(For Alameda County residents only)
2100 E. Seventh St.
1-800-606-6606

Alta Bates Peralta Outpatient Pharmacy
3300 Webster St. (ground floor)
510-869-8835



Locations that also accept needles




County locations that accept
controlled substances

Pleasanton

Pleasanton Police Department
4833 Bernal Ave.
925-931-5100

San Leandro

 **Alameda County Sheriff's Office**
15001 Foothill Blvd.
510-667-7721
Monday through Friday, 7 a.m.-5 p.m.

Davis Street Clinic
3081 Teagarden St.
510-347-4620
Monday through Thursday,
8 a.m.-8 p.m.
Friday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

Medical Arts Pharmacy
13847 E. 14th St.
510-357-1881

Union City

**Washington Township
Medical Foundation Nakamura Clinic**
33077 Alvarado Niles Road
510-248-1500



More Coming Soon!

Check acgov.org/medscoalition/aceh/safedisposal
or call 1-800-606-6606 for a current list
of drop-off locations.