Medi-Cal Rx

Mail-Back Envelopes for Opioids Now Available

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Disclaimer: This article was published by the Medi-Cal Drug Use Review (DUR) Program and is not an official policy of the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).

Background

Ensuring the safe disposal of unused opioid analgesics (OAs) is a critical component of the OA Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) to prevent nonmedical use, opioid use disorder (OUD), and overdose. Research has shown the presence of unused opioids in a household significantly increases the risk of accidental overdose among other family members who were not prescribed an opioid, especially young children.[1] Based on data from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, more than 40% of individuals who used opioids for nonmedical purposes obtained the medication from a friend or relative.[2] Out of the 8 million people who reported using prescription opioids for nonmedical reasons in 2024, 4% (320,000) took the medication from a friend or relative without asking.[2]

To increase availability of safe disposal systems, the OA REMS was modified to require opioid manufacturers to provide prepaid mail-back envelopes to pharmacies and other dispensers upon request. Effective March 31, 2025, pharmacies can order opioid mail-back envelopes free of charge through the Mail-Back Envelope Program and distribute the envelopes to patients for safe opioid disposal. The goal of the Mail-Back Envelope Program is to provide patients and caregivers with a convenient way to safely dispose of any unused or expired OAs.

How to Order and Distribute Mail-Back Envelopes

- Pharmacies can order prepaid drug mail-back envelopes free of charge from the Safe Opioid Disposal Materials page on the OA REMS website, or by calling 1-800-503-0784.
- Each prepaid drug mail-back envelope will include instructions for use and the Patient Education Sheet. The Patient Education Sheet is available in English and Spanish on the Safe Opioid Disposal Materials page.
- Pending receipt, pharmacies will be able to provide prepaid drug mail-back envelopes to patients and/or caregivers according to the pharmacy's internal procedures.
- Patients and/or caregivers will place the unused OAs in the prepaid and unmarked envelope and drop it off at any mailbox for shipment via the United States Postal Service (USPS). The destruction site will then destroy the prepaid drug mail-back envelope in compliance with Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) regulations.

- Although this REMS modification adds the option for pharmacies to order mail-back envelopes, it does not require use of this method or prevent pharmacies from offering alternative disposal methods (such as on-site collection bins).
- Pharmacists should continue to counsel patients on the safe use, serious risks, storage, and disposal of OAs, including use of prepaid drug mail-back envelopes and drug take-back sites.
- More information on the mail-back envelopes and answers to Frequently Asked Questions are available on the OA REMS website.

Information for Patients

- The Patient Guide has been updated to include the recommended methods for safe disposal of unused opioids, including mail-back envelopes and drug take-back locations.
- Refer to the new 30-second How to Safely Dispose of Unused or Expired Medicine video created by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- For more information on safe disposal methods, patients can visit the Where and How to Dispose of Unused Medicines page on the FDA's website.
- The California State Board of Pharmacy (BOP) created an online, searchable tool for patients to locate Drug Takeback Locations in their area.

While not mandatory under the REMS program, all health care professionals who provide care to patients on OA therapy are strongly recommended to complete REMS-compliant continuing education (CE) to learn more about safe use of opioids, including important counseling points on safe disposal. Free, accredited, REMS-compliant CE activities are available online through the OA REMS website.

Providers can refer to the Healthcare Provider Letter for more information about mail-back envelopes, reminders about REMS-compliant CE, updates to the Patient Guide, and how to report adverse events related to opioid medications.

References

1. Arakkal AT, Polgreen LA, Chapman CG, et al. Association between household opioid prescriptions and risk for overdose among family members not prescribed opioids. *Pharmacotherapy*. 2024;44(2):110-121. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/phar.2891.
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2025). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP25-07-007, NSDUH Series H-60). Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Available at: https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/2024-nsduh-annual-national-report.