

to your

# Health!

*"Promoting Good Health Through Information"*

Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System • Veterans Health Education Newsletter • Winter 2011

## New and Improved Patient Orientation

*Rosemary Gill, RN, MS*

Have you taken advantage of our New Patient Orientation? Whether you are a new patient or well-established, we are always working to improve our service to you. In the past year we have made improvements to the new patient process. We think our changes will make things easier for all of our patients.

New Patient Orientation is offered at all VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) sites except Menlo Park. We have streamlined this process so that you can go through New Patient Orientation at your convenience. You don't need an appointment, just check in at the Business Office at Palo Alto, Livermore or Monterey. Or, you can ask the clerks in primary care at our other sites. During Orientation, you will watch a short video and also receive helpful materials, such as the newly revised Personal Health Journal and the Patient Handbook. Orientation is also a good opportunity to sign up for My HealthVet, the VA's online health information service. Each time you come to see your primary care provider you will continue to get your Personal Health Summary containing a list of your medical problems, your medications, your recent test results, and other information. You can keep this in your Personal Health Journal binder.

Be sure to check out the Veterans Health Education website at <http://www.paloalto.va.gov/vhe.asp>. Not only can you find the Patient Handbook there (giving you detailed information about our many services and how to access them), but also emergency numbers, newsletters and community and other health resources. We hope that you find the changes we have made to New Patient Orientation helpful to you in your journey to optimal health. ■

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## Recipe for Health

### CORN CHOWDER

Here's a creamy chowder without the cream – or fat.

#### Ingredients:

1 tbsp vegetable oil	2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
2 tbsp celery, finely diced	1 cup water
2 tbsp onion, finely diced	1/4 tsp salt
2 tbsp green pepper, finely diced	Black pepper to taste
1 package (10 oz) frozen whole kernel corn	1/4 tsp paprika
1 cup raw potatoes, peeled, diced in 1/2-inch pieces	2 tbsp flour
	2 cup lowfat or skim milk

#### Directions:

1. Heat oil in medium saucepan. Add celery, onion, and green pepper, and sauté for 2 minutes.
2. Add corn, potatoes, water, salt, pepper, and paprika. Bring to boil, then reduce heat to medium. Cook covered for about 10 minutes or until potatoes are tender.
3. Place 1/2 cup of milk in jar with tight-fitting lid. Add flour and shake vigorously.
4. Gradually add milk-flour mixture to cooked vegetables. Then add remaining milk.
5. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to boil and thickens.
6. Serve garnished with chopped, fresh parsley.

**Yield:** 4 servings

**Serving size:** 1 cup

#### Each serving provides:

Calories: 186	Total fat: 5 g
Saturated fat: 1 g	Cholesterol: 5 mg
Sodium: 205 mg	Total fiber: 4 g
Protein: 7 g	Carbohydrates: 31 g
Potassium: 455 mg	

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health)

# Street Drug Dangers: Methamphetamine

*Sergio Flores B.A., Samantha Rafie, M.S., Psychology Practicum Students and Laura Peters, Ph.D., Staff Psychologist*

## What is Methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine or “Meth” is a street drug, also called amphetamine, speed, crank, crystal, ice, or uppers. Methamphetamine was originally used in nasal decongestants, inhalers, and in the treatment of sleep disorders and obesity. Since it was found that amphetamines improved alertness and performance, they were widely used by the military during World War II. However, by the 1970’s methamphetamine was considered a drug with little medical use and a high potential for abuse.

## How does Meth work?

Methamphetamine is arguably one of the most addictive of the street drugs. Meth can be taken by mouth, snorted through the nose, injected or smoked. After entering the bloodstream, it increases certain chemicals in the brain, which causes an intense high. This intense high helps explain why Meth users become so addicted.

## How common is Meth use?

The National Survey of Drug use and Health (NSDUH)

found that in 2009, an estimated 502,000 Americans used methamphetamines at least once during the previous year (less than 0.1% of the US population). The most common user of Meth is between the ages of 18 and 25.

## What are the short- and long-term effects of Meth use?

A person who uses Meth may show any of the following symptoms: wakefulness, nervousness, nonstop talking, moodiness, irritability, purposeless picking at skin, loss of appetite, a false sense of confidence and power, and aggressive or violent behavior. Use over time can result in severe problems with motor skills, emotions, memory and thinking. Long-term effects of Meth use include “Meth Mouth” (serious dental problems), weight loss, feeling like others are out to get you (paranoia) and seeing and hearing things that are not there (visual and auditory hallucinations).

## What treatment is available?

While there are no medications currently approved by the FDA to treat methamphetamine addiction, psychological

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# Get Checked: Ask Your Provider for an HIV Test

*José Parés-Avila, DNP, ARNP*

There is no way to know if you have HIV unless you take a simple blood test. It is estimated that 21% of people with HIV in the U.S. do not know their HIV status. Why should you consider taking the test?

- You can have HIV without any signs or symptoms for up to 10 years.
- Advances in treatment have turned HIV into a manageable chronic condition.
- It is better to find out sooner rather than later. As a matter of fact, 50% of people diagnosed with HIV have signs of disease progression which can potentially make it harder to treat.

For these reasons, the VA has made routine HIV testing available to all veterans. By “routine”, we mean adding the test as an option in your overall wellness check—just like we do when we test your cholesterol or screen you for diabetes. Public health experts and health professionals now advise that all adults get tested for HIV.

## HIV testing at the VA is voluntary and confidential.

You can ask for the test or your provider can offer it. Either way, the test will NOT be performed without your

clear verbal permission. The test is absolutely confidential and having it done will not affect your VA care or your eligibility for VA benefits.

## What does it mean if my test is negative?

Your provider will go over this with you. If you have no risk factors for acquiring HIV, you will not need another test. However, after a conversation about risk factors with your provider the two of you may decide that you need re-testing if there are ongoing risk factors currently or in the recent past.

## What does it mean if my test is positive?

Your provider will immediately refer you for state of the art specialty care. The VA Palo Alto system has a specialty HIV clinic where you would be seen by a multidisciplinary team of Infectious Diseases physicians, a nurse practitioner, an HIV specialty pharmacist and ancillary services that include psychology, social work, and nutrition.

Finding out your HIV status is a great way to take charge of your health. It empowers you with knowledge and helps you make decisions that will positively impact your well-being. Talk to your healthcare provider about getting tested for HIV.

For more information, visit [www.hiv.va.gov](http://www.hiv.va.gov)

# Household Hazardous Waste Disposal

Ariane Wilson, PharmD

Have you ever stood in front of the medicine cabinet, scratching your head wondering what you should do with home medical waste—bottles of expired medication, used needles and syringes, even household chemicals? No one wants to take a chance and incorrectly dispose of dangerous items in a way that would cause harm to others or the environment. What is the best way to get rid of household hazardous waste?

For expired or unwanted medications and chemicals, many people have probably heard the myth that you should flush them down the toilet or pour them down the drain. That is incorrect! In the right setting, medications can positively impact our health and improve our quality of life. However, coming in contact with medications that are not meant for you could potentially cause harm. Flushing medicine down the drain puts these medications into the environment and exposes everyone to chemicals that may be unsafe for them.

To correctly dispose of expired medications or chemicals, check with your county to see if your area has a pharmaceutical waste program with an easy disposal method such as a drop box. If your county does not have a medication waste program, you can dispose of the medication in regular trash.

## Tips for medication disposal:

- Remove any personal information on the medication bottle or place the medication in a new sealable container, like a plastic bag.
- If you are disposing of pills or powders, make it so others cannot swallow them. Pour glue into the container to stick the pills together. Or, add some liquid to dissolve the contents into a paste, then add an inedible substance like kitty litter, sawdust or coffee grounds to the mix to make it unpalatable.
- If you are disposing of patches, fold them in half and seal them in a container.
- If you are disposing of liquid medications or chemicals, place the bottle in a sealed plastic bag to prevent leakage.
- Seal all the medication containers with tape, then place in a larger bag or box and secure it.
- Dispose of the medications in a waste bin that is protected from children and animals, close to the time of garbage collection.

California law prohibits the disposal of needles, syringes or lancets into regular trash, even if they are in an approved sharps container. Disposing of needles in the trash can put sanitation workers at risk of injury. Always place household sharps waste in an approved biohazard sharps container. To

correctly dispose of sharps, check with your county to see where and when drop-offs are available.

## Tips for sharps disposal:

- Only fill the container  $\frac{3}{4}$  full. This will prevent difficulty in closing the container
- Close the container fully, snapping it shut so it is not re-openable.
- Keep the container separate from any other garbage and NEVER place in recycling waste.

VA Palo Alto does not accept medications, used sharps (needles, syringes, lancets) or chemicals from patients for disposal. Check with your county office for locations, dates and other requirements needed for waste collection. Help protect the environment and the community by making the effort at proper disposal of household hazardous waste.

## Local Authorities

<b>Santa Clara</b> (408) 299-7300	<b>Contra Costa</b> (800) 750-4096	<b>Calaveras</b> (209) 754-6403
<b>San Mateo</b> (650) 363-4718	<b>San Joaquin</b> (209) 468-3066	<b>Tuolumne</b> (209) 533-5588
<b>Alameda</b> (800) 606-6606	<b>Santa Cruz</b> (831) 454-2606	<b>Monterey</b> (831) 755-4505
	<b>Stanislaus</b> (209) 525-4123	

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## Dangers of Meth

interventions offer hope. A broad treatment program that includes relapse prevention, individual counseling, family education, 12-Step techniques, drug testing, and support for non-drug related activities has been shown to be effective.

Methamphetamine abuse and addiction can cause long-lasting damage to users and their families. Recognizing methamphetamine abuse early can help families and friends intervene for loved ones struggling with this devastating drug.

For more information about methamphetamine and treatment options, visit the KCI Anti-Meth Site [http://www.kci.org/meth\\_info/faq\\_meth.htm](http://www.kci.org/meth_info/faq_meth.htm) or the National Institute on Drug Abuse <http://www.nida.nih.gov/researchreports/methamph/methamph.html>. For questions about Addiction Treatment at the VA Palo Alto, please call 650-617-2734.

## VA Palo Alto Health Care System Facilities

### VA PALO ALTO DIVISION

3801 Miranda Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94304  
(650) 493-5000

### VA LIVERMORE DIVISION

4951 Arroyo Road  
Livermore, CA 94550  
(925) 373-4700

### VA MENLO PARK DIVISION

795 Willow Road  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
(650) 493-5000

### VA CAPITOLA OPC

1350 N. 41st Street,  
Suite 102  
Capitola, CA 95010  
(831) 464-5519

### VA FREMONT OPC

39199 Liberty Street  
Fremont, CA 94538  
(510) 791-4000

### VA MODESTO OPC

1524 McHenry Avenue,  
Suite 315  
Modesto, CA 95350  
(209) 557-6200

### VA MONTEREY OPC

3401 Engineer Lane  
Seaside, CA 93955  
(831) 883-3800

### VA SAN JOSE OPC

80 Great Oaks Boulevard  
San Jose, CA 95119  
(408) 363-3000

### VA SONORA OPC

13663 Mono Way  
Sonora, CA 95370  
(209) 588-2600

### VA STOCKTON OPC

7777 Freedom Drive  
French Camp, CA 95231  
(209) 946-3400

### World Wide Web Address:

[www.paloalto.va.gov](http://www.paloalto.va.gov)



● = Inpatient Campus   ● = Outpatient Clinic



*Taking an active role in your care can help prevent medication errors! Carry your medication list with you at all times!*

### Questions or Comments?

If you have any questions or topics you would like addressed in *To Your Health* feel free to contact:

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## Tips for Healthy Living

- Go for a half-hour walk instead of watching TV.
- Know your fats. Use some vegetable oil instead of butter for cooking and baking.

[www.smallstep.gov](http://www.smallstep.gov)