

Syringe Service & Harm Reduction Programs

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction is a public health principle designed to decrease the harm associated with human behaviors. Harm reduction can prevent illness or injury that may occur as a result of doing potentially dangerous things. Some examples of harm reduction include wearing a seatbelt while driving, wearing sunscreen, and syringe service programs.

What is a syringe service program?

Syringe service programs are based on the concept of harm reduction and sometimes called needle or syringe exchange programs. They are fixed or mobile facilities where people who inject substances can receive new, sterile syringes and other supplies that they need to safely inject and properly dispose of used syringes.

Syringe service programs also provide referrals to health and/or social service resources, including substance abuse and mental health treatment. Some syringe service programs may offer food, clothing and other necessities. Syringe service programs are recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prevent the transmission of HIV disease and hepatitis B and C and to reduce the occurrence of bacterial infections.

Do syringe service programs encourage injection drug use?

No. Many studies over nearly 40 years have found the opposite to be true, showing that syringe service programs are effective at reducing injection drug use and assisting people in their recovery from the disease of addiction.¹

What does a visit to a syringe exchange program look like?

Participants in a syringe service program are greeted by staff and/or a volunteer, who will assess what they might need that day including supplies, testing, immunizations and/or referrals to additional services.

Participants may be asked how frequently they typically inject a substance to ensure they are provided with enough syringes to use a new one during every injection. Alcohol pads, bandages and other supplies are provided to prevent the spread of disease and bacterial infection. Participants are encouraged to bring in used syringes but are not required to. All returned syringes are disposed of safely.

Participants are asked if they have recently received testing for HIV, hepatitis and STDs, and if they would like to be tested for these during this visit. In addition, participants are offered adult immunizations, condoms and referrals to health and/or social services, including substance abuse and mental health treatment.

Some syringe services also may provide other necessities, such as food, clothing, or toiletries.

A very small amount of non-identifiable information is collected in order to support program planning and evaluation.



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Will someone who goes to a syringe service program be reported to the police or other law enforcement officials?

No. Syringe service programs do not collect or provide any information that would identify people to law enforcement. Where harm reduction and syringe service programs are offered, law enforcement often collaborate with local health departments to ensure the safety of the staff and volunteers, the participants of harm reduction and syringe service programs and the community at large. Law enforcement officers do not wait outside of syringe service programs to arrest people. In fact, they work with participants and prosecutors to prevent unnecessary charges related to participation in these programs. Public health, law enforcement and syringe service program staff work hard to ensure a safe and accessible environment for those that use the program and the larger community.

What other services do syringe service programs provide?

Syringe service programs provide testing for transmissible diseases including HIV, hepatitis and STDs, as well as adult immunizations and condoms. They also provide referrals to health and/or social services including substance abuse and mental health treatment. Syringe service programs offer safe places for the disposal of used sharps and containers for the safe disposal of new sharps. Some syringe services may also provide necessities such as food, clothing or toiletries.

Why do syringe service programs give out more than just sterile syringes/needles?

When substances are prepared and injected, the supplies used may come into contact with blood that can spread HIV or hepatitis B or C. To prevent the spread of viral and bacterial infections, participants are provided with new supplies to use for every injecting event.

What is naloxone and do syringe service programs supply it to participants and loved ones?

Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, is an overdose-reversal medication that counters the effect of opioids such as heroin and morphine. Naloxone only works if the person has opioids in their system. Naloxone is not addictive. Hoosiers can visit <https://optin.in.gov/> or contact a syringe service program for more information about naloxone or to find a location to obtain it.

Can people using injectable medications (examples: insulin, B-12) use syringe service programs to obtain syringes, sharps disposal containers, and other supplies and associated services?

Yes. Syringe service programs are public health programs open to anyone that needs their services and supplies. People using injectable medications like insulin, the vitamin B-12, or others are welcomed at every syringe service program and are provided with the supplies and services that are best for them.

Where are syringe service programs located in Indiana?

A listing of syringe service programs in Indiana is available at <https://www.in.gov/health/hiv-std-viral-hepatitis/harm-reduction-and-syringe-service-programs/> or by calling Erika Chapman, MPH, CPH, CHES, Harm Reduction Program Manager, at 317-234-3122.

I have another question that was not answered here, how can I have it answered?

If you have any questions about harm reduction or syringe service programs in Indiana, please contact Erika Chapman, MPH, CPH, CHES, Harm Reduction Program Manager, at 317-234-3122 or echapman@health.in.gov

¹"Several studies have found that providing sterilized equipment to injection drug users substantially reduces risk of HIV infection, increases the probability that they will initiate drug treatment, and does not increase drug use." (National HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategy for the United States, 2010)