Needs-Based Distribution at Syringe Services Programs

CDC supports a needs-based approach to syringe distribution.

Needs-based syringe distribution provides people who inject drugs (PWID) access to the number of syringes they need to ensure that a new, sterile syringe is available for each injection. A needs-based approach provides sterile syringes with no restrictions, including no requirement to return used syringes.

CDC supports the needs-based approach to syringe distribution, as the evidence shows that this is the best practice for reducing new HIV and viral hepatitis infections. Restrictive syringe access policies are associated with higher injection risk behaviors and higher rates of HIV and other bloodborne infections.

In contrast, under the most restrictive approach to syringe distribution, syringe services programs (SSPs) clients must return used syringes and can get only as many new syringes as used ones returned.

SSPs that use a needs-based approach reduce their clients’ risk of transmitting hepatitis C, HIV, and other infectious diseases.

SSPs help prevent bloodborne infections related to injection drug use.

People injecting drugs should use one sterile syringe (including a needle) for each injection to prevent bloodborne infections like hepatitis C and HIV. This means that a never-used, sterile syringe is used for each injection.

Without reliable access to syringes, PWID remain at risk for contracting infectious diseases.
Syringe services programs (SSPs) are community-based programs that:

- **provide access** to sterile needles and syringes
- **facilitate safe disposal** of used syringes
- **provide referrals** to substance use disorder treatment

Most SSPs provide linkage to substance use disorder treatment and have been found to improve people who inject drugs (PWID) enrollment and retention in these treatment programs.

**SSPs** can further the impact of a needs-based approach to syringe delivery and increase sterile syringe coverage in the community by providing additional sterile syringes to clients to distribute to their peers who do not or cannot use SSPs.

**Increasing the number of syringes among PWID through distribution by peers helps to reach the goal of providing a sterile syringe for each injection.**

PWID can play an important role in supporting safer injection-related behaviors among their peers. SSPs with a needs-based approach to syringe delivery do not increase syringe litter; they promote the safe disposal of used syringes by providing sharps containers, drop boxes, community clean-ups, and other methods of controlling syringe litter.

**Resources**

2. Bluthenthal et al. Higher syringe coverage is associated with lower odds of HIV risk and does not increase unsafe syringe disposal among syringe exchange program clients. DAD 2007: [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2562866/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2562866/).
5. Des Jarlais et al. Syringe Service Programs for Persons Who Inject Drugs in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Areas — United States, 2013. MMWR Weekly 2015: [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6448a3.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6448a3.htm).