

Syringe Exchange Programs

Myths vs. Facts

There are many misconceptions about syringe exchange. Often community members are unaware of the role syringe exchange programs play in the overall effort to build healthier communities and to provide people who inject drugs with opportunities for healthier futures. The following information provides answers to some common mistaken beliefs about syringe exchange programs.

MYTH: Drug use will increase in areas with syringe exchanges.

FACT: There is no evidence of any link between increased drug use and syringe exchange programs. The U.S. Surgeon General has determined that syringe exchange programs, when part of a comprehensive effort to reduce the spread of disease, do not increase drug use (1). Unfortunately, illicit injection drug use is a sad reality in our communities. Syringe exchange programs provide a point of contact for clients to access health-care and treatment resources and aim to reduce the spread of disease.

MYTH: Syringe exchange doesn't fix the problem of drug addiction.

FACT: The primary goal of syringe exchange is to reduce the spread of blood-borne diseases and minimize blood infections by providing free sterile syringes and other equipment to people who inject drugs. However, syringe exchange programs also provide another point of contact for individuals to obtain access to resources for substance treatment and other health and social services. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute of Health, syringe exchange participants are five times more likely to enter a substance treatment program than individuals who haven't used a syringe exchange program (2).

MYTH: People who inject drugs won't return dirty syringes.

FACT: Syringe exchange programs provide a point of contact to educate participants about the safe disposal of used syringes. There are many reasons participants may not bring their used syringes to the exchange on any given day, such as their syringes were confiscated by law enforcement or they disposed of their used syringes elsewhere. Syringe exchange providers in Utah work with participants to ensure used needles are disposed of safely by providing sharps containers to participants and conducting needle cleanups across communities.

For more information about syringe exchange in Utah, please contact syringeexchange@utah.gov.

1. "Syringe Services Programs". Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 3 Aug. 2017, www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/ssps.html

2. "Reducing Harms from Injection Drug Use & Opioid Use Disorder with Syringe Services Programs". Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 2017, www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/risk/cdchiv-fs-syringe-services.pdf

MYTH: There is no widespread support for syringe exchange programs.

FACT: The effectiveness of syringe exchange programs in reducing the spread of disease and promoting healthier communities has led to widespread support among local and national organizations including, but not limited to the following:

- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Bar Association
- American Medical Association
- American Public Health Association
- American Society of Addiction Medicine
- International Red Cross-Red Crescent Society
- Latino Commission on AIDS
- NAACP
- National Academy of Sciences
- National Black Police Association
- National Institute on Drug Abuse
- Office of National Drug Control Policy
- Presidential Advisory Committee on AIDS
- US Conference of Mayors
- Utah AIDS Foundation
- Utah Department of Health
- Utah Department of Health and Human Services
- Utah Naloxone
- World Bank
- World Health Organization