

Vermont Syringe Exchange Programs

Syringe Exchange Programs (SEPs) are designed to prevent the spread of HIV, viral hepatitis and other blood-borne pathogens while providing a bridge to drug treatment and other prevention services for injection drug users. In addition to decreasing the likelihood that injection drug equipment will be shared, SEPs provide members with options for safe disposal of used, potentially infectious, needles and syringes. They also provide testing for HIV and hepatitis C, as well as referrals for recommended vaccinations.

While Vermont has consistently supported the harm reduction efforts of SEPs, the associated costs of these programs vastly outweigh the available funding due to a longstanding ban on federal funding for such programs. In order to prevent an outbreak of HIV or hepatitis C due to injection drug use, adequate numbers of sterile syringes must be available in addition to substance use prevention and treatment services.

What do Syringe Exchange Programs Provide?

Syringe Exchange Programs provide a variety of important services to community members at highest risk for serious health issues:

- Provision of sterile syringes and other injection supplies
- Safe disposal of used syringes (removal of used syringes from the community)
- Safer sex supplies and education
- Overdose prevention education and resources
- Naloxone
- Referrals for substance abuse treatment
- Provision of harm reduction options while injection drug users prepare for or wait for treatment
- HIV and hepatitis C testing and referrals for follow up medical care if needed
- Referrals for recommended vaccines

Where are Syringe Exchange Programs Located?

The Vermont Department of Health provides funding to three community based organizations that operate SEPs in strategic locations around the state – Burlington, St. Johnsbury, Rutland, and White River Jct. One of these organizations also offers community-based exchanges to increase access for clients who cannot travel to one of the fixed location sites.

Vermont Law

SEPs operate in Vermont in accordance with Title 18, § 4478. According to Title 18, § 4476, possession of needles and syringes as part of a SEP is not in violation of Vermont's paraphernalia law. All SEPs follow VDH operating guidelines to ensure safety and community involvement and must apply annually with VDH for recertification in order to operate.

