More Syringe Exchanges Can Open in New Jersey, Thanks to a New Law

A second New Jersey law makes it legal to possess a syringe, and a third just-signed law creates a review panel to study overdoses.

January 24, 2022 By Trent Straube

Harm reduction advocates in New Jersey scored three wins this month when Governor Phil Murphy signed three related bills into law. The new legislation will allow more syringe exchange programs to open, decriminalize the possession of syringes and create a review panel to look at overdoses, reports NJ.com.

The laws will also help lower the rates of HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C—three viruses that can be transmitted through injection drug use. In addition, syringe exchange programs and harm reduction efforts offer the benefits of helping people get tested and connected to care.

> "South Jersey AIDS Alliance applauds the New Jersey Legislature's bold act in protecting and expanding syringe access in New Jersey. Today's vote secures health services for some of the state of NJ's most vulnerable residents," said Carol Harney, CEO https://t.co/mQPxmVoQ2o
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> — SJ AIDS Alliance (@SJAIDSAlliance) January 11, 2022

"The principles of harm reduction are simple. We must accept that there is drug use in our communities. Some ways of using drugs are more dangerous than other ways. We need to meet people where they are, rather than forcing on them some preconceived notion of what their life should look like," state Senator Joseph Vitale, D–Middlesex, a main sponsor of the bill, told NJ.com.

“The signing of these bills into law will help us reinforce the truth that harm reduction policies are successful because they help us to meet people who use drugs where they are, without judgment.”

About 3,081 New Jersey residents died of suspected drug overdoses last year, according to a statement from the governor reported by NJ.com.

Today, @GovMurphy signed the Syringe Access Bill & Syringe Decrim Bill into law!

New Jersey can now move forward in expanding syringe services after decades of being held back by a restrictive law.

Together we can end the overdose crisis!???????????

https://t.co/CHexcXc5oN

— NJ Harm Reduction Coalition (@NJHarmReduction)

January 18, 2022

Needle exchanges have been legal in the state since 2006. But the law that allowed their operation also gave local officials the authority to open or close the centers. The new law, S3009, gives oversight to the New Jersey Department of Health.

Previously, only seven municipalities allowed syringe exchanges to open in their communities: Asbury Park, Atlantic City, Camden, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton. Last year, the city council in Atlantic City tried to shutter the city’s syringe exchange, but after advocates fought back, a judge allowed it to remain open. Under the state’s new law, local authorities will not be able to close the location.

Congrats to New Jersey for easing the path forward to creating more syringe services programs throughout the state!

This is a critical step that will help us end the HIV epidemic and support people who use drugs.https://t.co/ejTjigBKUB

— AIDS United (@AIDS_United) January 18, 2022

A related bill signed into law (S3493) decriminalizes the possession of syringes. And a third one (A798) creates a review team to look at drug overdoses in the state. The opioid crisis has caused more people to use injection drugs and raised the risk of overdosing. What's more, the introduction of the deadly opioid fentanyl into the nation's drug supply has increased the likelihood of overdoses, making drug use more dangerous than ever.

In related news, see "White House Now Supports Harm Reduction Such as Needle Exchange" and "We Can't Beat Viral Hepatitis, HIV and Overdoses if We Close Syringe Services."

"These bills, coupled with the creation of local drug overdose fatality review teams, will strengthen our ability to save lives and further our commitment to ending the opioid crisis in New Jersey," Gov. Murphy said.https://t.co/L7EBJpeDbI

— SJ AIDS Alliance (@SJAIDSAlliance) January 19, 2022

Both HIV and hepatitis C can be transmitted via blood-to-blood contact, including through shared needles and drug equipment that has come in contact with blood. Hepatitis refers to inflammation of the liver. There can be many causes, but hepatitis C virus can result in a lifelong infection, mild

to serious scarring of the liver (fibrosis and cirrhosis, respectively), liver cancer, liver failure and death. The good news is that hep C is curable in most cases. To learn more, see the Hepatitis C section of Hep magazine's Hepatitis Basics, which includes an introduction to viral hepatitis as well as other forms of hepatitis and liver disease, such as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), alcoholic liver disease, autoimmune hepatitis and primary biliary cholangitis (PBC). And for a collection of articles in POZ about the intersection of hep C virus and HIV, click the hashtag #Hepatitis C.

HIV, in contrast, is a virus that attacks the immune system. Over several years, the immune system becomes depleted, and the body isn't able to fight infections, leading to an AIDS diagnosis. Although there is no cure for HIV, many safe and effective treatments—often just one pill a day—are available. The medications help people living with HIV enjoy long and healthy lives and keep them from transmitting the virus to others. For more, see the Basics of HIV/AIDS in POZ.com, a sister publication of HepMag.com.

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/syringe-exchanges-can-open-new-jersey-thanks-new-law-hiv-hepatitis-overdose