

Coalition for Responsible Syringe Policy

Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Illinois Pharmacists Association

Illinois Association of Public Health Administrators

Illinois Council of Health System Pharmacists

Chicago Department of Public Health

AIDS Foundation of Chicago

Illinois Nurses Association

Illinois Retail Merchants Association

Illinois Planned Parenthood Council

ACLU of Illinois

Cook County Bureau of Health

Walgreen Company

Illinois Public Health Association

Illinois State Medical Society

Illinois Academy of Family Physicians

Illinois Chapter, National Association of Social Workers

Cook County Department of Public Health

Chicago Bar Association – Lesbian/Gay Rights Committee

Syringe Purchasing and Disposal

Fears about streets, parks and playgrounds becoming littered with used and potentially HIV-infected syringes have raised concerns about lifting restrictions in Illinois prohibiting the sale of syringes without a prescription. While close examination of syringe disposal issues is warranted, experiences in other states where syringe sales have been deregulated indicate that disposal problems are not likely to occur.

After Connecticut deregulated syringe sales in 1992, an evaluation team reported no significant problems with syringe disposal (*Journal of AIDS and Human Retrovirology* [JAIDS], 1995). In Connecticut and Minnesota, neither law enforcement nor public health officials documented an increase in the number of syringes discarded in alleys, parks, or other public places after non-prescription syringe purchasing was enacted. In fact, there are no studies to indicate that syringe sale deregulation would increase the number of improperly discarded syringes.

In “Disposal Tips for Home Health Care,” the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends that injectors store used syringes in hard-plastic or metal opaque containers that should be sealed when full and thrown away.

Similar recommendations were documented in a study of 15 syringe disposal projects in the U.S., Canada, and Australia (JAIDS, 1998). Among the most common strategies reported were educating injectors to store used syringes in puncture-resistant containers that can be sealed and discarded in the trash, establishing community “drop-off” boxes and distributing sharps containers that can be taken to local collection sites, hospitals, or pharmacies for disposal. Where syringe disposal projects had been established, the study found that both diabetics and drug users were served by the program and that the number of syringes discarded on the streets had decreased. The programs used a variety of means to publicize the service, including informational brochures, outreach, and public education campaigns.

Disposal models used in other states:

- In Washington, red plastic disposal containers stamped with the biohazard symbol have been installed in all public restrooms aboard the state’s 29 ferries, which transport 68,000 passengers daily.
- In Connecticut, health departments, AIDS service organizations, and some pharmacies serve as disposal sites for people who purchase syringes.
- In Maryland and Florida, refurbished postal boxes have been painted red and placed on street corners, and in fire stations, police and sheriff departments, and mobile home parks to be used as syringe disposal sites. The local public health departments are responsible for collecting disposed syringes and individuals using the sites are exempt from criminal possession prosecution.
- In California and Florida, pharmacies serve as drop-off points for the disposal of used syringes.

For more information contact Amy LaMantia at 312-922-2322 or alamantia@aidschicago.org.