



## Non-prescription Sale of Syringes in California Pharmacies

Until the signing of Senate Bill (SB) 1159 (Vasconcellos, Chapter 608, Statutes of 2004) by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, California was one of only five states that required a prescription in order to purchase a syringe.<sup>i</sup> The legislation established the Disease Prevention Demonstration Project (DPDP), which allows local governments to permit pharmacies to sell up to ten syringes without a prescription to an adult. The program, which originally was slated to conclude in 2010, was re-authorized by Assembly Bill (AB) 1701, and will sunset on December 31, 2018.

### The Need:

- In California, injection drug use is associated with 19 percent of the 190,000 reported HIV/AIDS cases, and it is estimated that approximately 750 new HIV infections may be attributed to injection drug use each year.<sup>ii</sup>
- It has been estimated that at least 60 percent of prevalent cases and nearly all incident cases of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection are associated with injection drug use.<sup>iii</sup> In 2008, 36 acute HCV infections and 69,519 unique chronic HCV cases were reported in California, and HCV-related deaths in the state more than doubled from 503 in 1995 to 1,195 in 2004.<sup>iv, v</sup>
- In Sacramento, 87 percent of patients of a methadone clinic were found to have HCV antibody.<sup>vi</sup> In San Francisco, 45 percent of injection drug users (IDUs) under 30 years of age were found to have HCV antibody and, among IDUs who have injected more than six years, 71.3 percent were found to have HCV antibody.<sup>vii, viii</sup>

There is consistent indication that increased use of pharmacies is associated with lower syringe sharing rates among IDUs, as was recently demonstrated in studies of New York's Expanded Syringe Access Program.<sup>ix, x</sup>

### Currently in California:

- Sixteen counties and four cities in California have authorized a DPDP.<sup>xi</sup> The Boards of Supervisors of four counties rejected recommendations made by their local health officers to participate in the program.<sup>xii</sup>
- Over 650 pharmacies are participating in the program, and participating pharmacists are enthusiastic about the opportunity to provide injection drug using customers with health materials, information, and links to care.
- To date, research conducted on the program has found no evidence of negative effects, such as increased crime or syringe litter, associated with the program.



- Implementation of the DPDP has rolled out smoothly in most participating local health jurisdictions. Participating counties and cities have been positive about the opportunities to form new collaborations, to address the issue of syringe disposal, to provide syringe purchasers with essential health information, and to enlist pharmacies in public health efforts.
- The California Department of Public Health is required to conduct an evaluation and provide to the Governor and Legislature a report on the impact of syringe sales on rates of disease, rates of crime, rates of drug use, rates of needle-stick injury to law enforcement officers, and rates of unsafe discard of syringes. The report is available at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/aids>.

---

<sup>i</sup> In 2004, those states were California, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. As of January 2010, only California, Delaware, and New Jersey limit syringe access through legislatively mandated prescription requirements.

<sup>ii</sup> Facer, M.S.; Ritieni, A.; Marino, J.; and Grasso P. *Consensus Meeting on HIV/AIDS Incidence and Prevalence in California*. Sacramento, California Department of Health Services; 2001. (updated 2009).

<sup>iii</sup> Williams, I.T. Epidemiology of hepatitis C in the United States. *American Journal of Medicine* 1999; 107(6B):2-9.

<sup>iv</sup> California Department of Public Health, Sexually Transmitted Diseases Control Branch.. *Reported Chronic Hepatitis C virus (HCV) cases in California* 2008.

<sup>v</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. *An Analysis of Hepatitis C Mortality in California Counties Using Multiple Cause of Death and Census Data* 2008.

<sup>vi</sup> McCarthy, J.J., Flynn, N. Hepatitis C in methadone maintenance patients: prevalence and public policy implications. *J Addict Dis*. 2001;20(1):19-31.

<sup>vii</sup> Hahn, J.A., Page-Shafer, K., Lum, P.J., Ochoa, K., Moss, A.R. Hepatitis C virus infection and needle exchange use among young injection drug users in San Francisco. *Hepatology*. 2001 Jul;34(1):180-7.

<sup>viii</sup> Tseng, F.C., O'Brien, T.R., Zhang, M., Kral, A.H., Ortiz-Conde, B.A., Lorvick, J., Busch, M.P., Edlin, B.R. Seroprevalence of hepatitis C virus and hepatitis B virus among San Francisco injection drug users, 1998 to 2000. *Hepatology*. 2007 Sep;46(3):666-71.

<sup>ix</sup> Pouget, E.R., Deren, S., Fuller, C.M., Blaney, S., McMahon, J.M., Kang, S-Y., Tortu, S., Andia, J.F., Des Jarlais, D.C., Vlahov, D. Receptive Syringe Sharing Among Injection Drug Users in Harlem and the Bronx During the New York State Expanded Syringe Access Demonstration Program. *JAIDS*. 2005;39(4):471-477.

<sup>x</sup> Fuller, C., Galea, S., Caceres, W., Blaney, S., Sisco, S., Vlahov, D. Multilevel community-based intervention to increase access to sterile syringes among injection drug users through pharmacy sales in New York City. *Am J Public Health* 2007;97:117-24.

<sup>xi</sup> The counties are: Alameda, Contra Costa, Humboldt, Los Angeles, Marin, Mendocino, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, Yolo, and Yuba. The cities are Long Beach, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and West Hollywood.

<sup>xii</sup> These counties are Shasta, Riverside, Fresno, and Sacramento.