



For further information on NSP:

**Sexual Health and Blood-borne
Virus Program**

Department of Health

Ph: 9388 4841

www.public.health.wa.gov.au

WA Substance Users' Association (WASUA)

Ph: 9321 2877

www.wasua.com.au

WA AIDS Council (WAAC)

Ph: 9482 0000

www.waaims.com.au

HepatitisWA

Ph: 9328 8538 or

Country Callers: 1800 800 070

www.hepatitiswa.com.au

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

24 hours

Ph: 9442 5000 or

Country callers: 1800 198 024

There has never been a case in Western Australia of a person contracting HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C from a needlestick injury in a community setting.

Produced by
the Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Program
Communicable Disease Control Directorate
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Needle and syringe programs in our community



HP010453 OCT'13



Why do we need needle and syringe programs in our community?

Even though it's illegal, there are a small number of people in our community who inject drugs. People who inject drugs may come into contact with other people's blood by sharing needles and syringes. These people are more likely to get blood-borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Once you have a blood-borne virus you can transmit it to others by blood-to-blood contact. HIV and hepatitis B can also be transmitted through sex.

Needle and syringe programs (NSP) provide sterile needles and syringes to people who inject drugs. This helps prevent blood-borne viruses from being transmitted in our community. NSP help protect the health of **everyone** in the community.

People will inject drugs whether or not they can get sterile needles and syringes. NSP work together with drug treatment and education services to reduce drug-related harm in our community.

NSP do not encourage drug use.

Community benefits of NSP

- **NSP** reduce the spread of HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C among people who inject drugs and the wider community.
- **NSP** save money. HIV may lead to AIDS. Hepatitis B and hepatitis C can cause liver disease and other serious illnesses. Treating these diseases costs far more than preventing them through programs like NSP.
- **NSP** are often the only contact that people who inject drugs have with the health system.
- **NSP** provide people who inject drugs with information on safer injecting and on drug treatment services.
- **NSP** encourage the safe disposal of needles and syringes.

How are NSP services provided?

NSP are where people who inject drugs can get sterile needles and syringes. There are four main types of NSP: pharmacies, health services (such as hospitals and community health centres), needle and syringe vending machines (NSVM) and needle and syringe exchange programs (NSEP).

NSEP provide free sterile needles and syringes in exchange for used ones. Some services operate on a cost recovery model, whereby clients may have to pay for new needles and syringes if they do not return used ones. NSEP operate from both mobile and fixed sites in the metropolitan area and in some regional areas. Pharmacies and health services usually do not take back used needles and syringes.

All NSP must supply a safe disposal container with any needles and syringes they give out. They also offer health education and can refer people to drug treatment services.

More than half of all needles and syringes are distributed in Western Australia through NSEP.

Are NSP legal?

The law allows organisations approved by the Department of Health to provide sterile needles and syringes to people who inject drugs.

What about the health risks from discarded needles and syringes?

NSP encourage the safe disposal of used needles and syringes. They provide disposal containers and information on safe disposal. Most people who inject drugs dispose of their used needles safely, for example by returning their used needles and syringes to an NSEP.

Needles and syringes improperly discarded in the community may be of concern to the public. However, the risk of catching a blood-borne virus from a community needlestick injury is very low. Nonetheless, if a needlestick injury does occur, please seek medical advice immediately.

