

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

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Syringe Distribution Laws

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SUMMARY

The questions featured on this page were developed to identify variations in state laws that address syringes, syringe distribution, and syringe exchange. This page highlights national trends, and identifies how states have chosen different ways to provide access to sterile syringes. By noting variations in the laws, strengths and gaps in the legislation can be analyzed.

ABOUT SYRINGE DISTRIBUTION LAWS & THE DATA

When laws restrict the sale or distribution of sterile syringes, injection drug users (IDUs) are more likely to share syringes. Sharing syringes is a leading cause of the spread of blood-borne diseases like HIV/AIDS. Syringe distribution policies determine how easy or difficult it will be for IDUs to access sterile syringes.

Historically, drug paraphernalia laws criminalized the distribution and possession of syringes and decreased access to sterile syringes. Over time, some states have decriminalized the free distribution of syringes by removing the mention of syringes or explicitly excluding syringes from their criminal drug paraphernalia laws, relaxing rules on retail sale of syringes in pharmacy regulations, or by creating exceptions to laws which allow syringes to be distributed in an effort to prevent the spread of blood-borne diseases.

The data available here was last updated in March 2016.

NAVIGATING THE DATA

There are two ways to navigate the data using the interactive map: by selecting a state from the map or by selecting criteria that detail the characteristics of the laws.

Option 1 – State by state: Using the map, click on the state of interest. A table will appear with details about that state's law.

Option 2 – Multiple states: To view the law across multiple states, you may use the questions to filter through various criteria. Clicking on a question will expand the answers/criteria for you to select. In some cases, secondary questions may appear after answering one of the primary questions — these secondary questions dig deeper into the detail of that specific area of the law. The map will change based on the criteria you select.

You may also use the timeline slider to see the change in law over time, back to 2012.

The primary questions addressed are:

1. Does state law prohibit the sale or distribution of drug paraphernalia?
2. Does state law regulate the retail sale of syringes?

3. Is syringe exchange explicitly authorized by state law?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information about syringe distribution and related laws, please refer to the following resources:

- [Syringe Possession Laws](#) map on LawAtlas.org
- Burris et al., [Racial Disparities In Injection-Related HIV: A Case Study of Toxic Law](#), Temple Law Review, 82(5):1263-1307(2011).
- Research funded by the RWJF Public Health Law Research program: [Barriers to Reason: Laws Impacting HIV Prevention Efforts among Injecting Drug Users in the United States](#).
- Davis, C. "[Syringe Access Programs and the Surgeon General](#)." Network for Public Health Law.

This collection of syringe distribution laws does not provide legal advice nor does it address enforcement of laws, administrative policies, case law, or any other sources of law. Should you have a specific question about syringe distribution laws in your state, please contact an attorney in your jurisdiction.