



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health
DATE: 2014 March 20

NEEDLE/SYRINGE DISPOSAL AND RECOVERY

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 022-14 re Needle/Syringe Disposal and Recovery be received for information.

Key Points

- For people who use injection drugs, use of a sterile needle/syringe and related equipment for each injection reduces the risk of acquiring HIV and hepatitis B and C.
- In 2013, Counterpoint Needle Syringe Program (NSP) distributed 2,369,658 needles/syringes while 1,210,683 were returned. Many of the outstanding syringes will have been disposed in a safe manner, though not through the NSP. Nevertheless, improper disposal is an inherent risk of needle/syringe use. This challenge is not unique to the local area.
- The Health Unit, City of London, London CARES, and the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection are working together toward comprehensive approaches to support proper needle/syringe disposal.

Background

Provision of sterile needles/syringes and related equipment for use with each injection is an important public health intervention to mitigate risk among the population who use injection drugs. Proper disposal of used equipment reduces the risk of blood-borne infections, including HIV and hepatitis B and C associated with equipment sharing, and also reduces accidental needle stick injuries among the general public.

Barriers to proper disposal of used needles/syringes are cited in the literature. These include lack of knowledge of correct practices or locations; inability to properly store and dispose of used equipment related to living situations (e.g. homelessness); limited Needle Syringe Program (NSP) hours of operation and alternative disposal sites; and concerns about arrest for possession. Best practices for disposal and handling of used injection equipment are summarized in [Appendix A](#). These recommendations are part of a 2013 best practice document for Canadian harm reduction programs, and are consistent with practices in London.

In follow-up to the September 2013 Board Report [No. 092-13](#) entitled Harm Reduction Strategies, the current report describes needle/syringe disposal and recovery processes and strategies, as well as proposed strategies for enhancement. These strategies are a joint effort of the Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU), the City of London, London CARES, and the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection.

Needle Disposal and Recovery within the City of London

Counterpoint Needle Exchange Program: The Counterpoint Needle Exchange program is operated by the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) and funded through the Health Unit. It consists of a primary site at RHAC, satellite sites at MLHU and My Sister's Place, and mobile outreach. The mobile outreach component is funded by the AIDS Bureau of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Clients who use the NSP are educated regarding appropriate storage and disposal; offered sharps containers; and are encouraged to return used equipment to the NSP sites or to the mobile outreach worker, or to dispose of them in stationary needle collection bins that are located around the city. In the 12 month period from January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013, 2,369,658 syringes were distributed, while 1,210,683 were collected among the NSP sites and mobile outreach. Used equipment is not handled by staff, thus return numbers are estimates.

In the 2012 I-Track survey of people who use injection drugs in London, the majority of respondents (n=197) indicated that they most often disposed of used syringes in a drop box (57.9%) or returned them to the NSP (45.2%); 10.7% reported putting used syringes in a secured container and placing this in the garbage. A small proportion reported disposing directly in the garbage (5.1%) or on streets (1.0%). (Note: percent totals add to over 100.0% as more than one response was possible). Despite the strong association between the use of NSPs and safer disposal practices cited in the literature, improper disposal of injection drug equipment can be an inherent risk and ongoing challenge of needle/syringe distribution.

Stationary needle collection bins and role of London CAREs: Since 2008, 13 stationary needle collection bins have been installed at strategic locations by the City of London as part of London CAREs for collection of discarded injection equipment. In 2011 and 2012, approximately 114,000 and 186,000 syringes were recovered from the bins, respectively. In 2013, approximately 268,310 syringes were recovered. The growing use of the bins has been attributed to the placement of additional bins and enhanced collection efforts including neighborhood awareness and education provided to the community who use drugs. Current bin locations are listed on MLHU's "[Safe Disposal of Sharps](#)" webpage. Locations of the bins are based on known 'hot spots' for discarded syringes and/or public concern. Maintenance of the bins is the responsibility of London CAREs.

London CAREs outreach teams have regular shifts throughout the week for retrieval of syringes in identified 'hot spots' and identification of any new 'hot spots'. CAREs also responds to calls from the community regarding syringes found in public places, with the primary target area being the core of the city. By April 2014, this service will operate 24 hours per day. Additionally, CAREs works in partnership with community volunteers who conduct clean-up efforts along the Thames River and other areas in the city.

Community organizations, businesses and pharmacies: Many community businesses and organizations have been proactive in recognizing the need for safe disposal of sharps and have had sharps containers installed at their locations. Many have independent contracts for disposal, thus these collected syringes are not counted. Some pharmacies distribute sharps containers and accept them back when filled; these returns are also not counted. The City of London Parks and Recreation and Roads and Transportation departments also play a role in needle/syringe collection and recovery. This includes installing the bins, participating in community clean up events and training Parks and Recreation staff on safe collection practices for discarded drug use equipment. City Recreation Centres now contain wall-mounted sharps containers.

Information for the public: Information about safe handling and disposal of sharps is on MLHU's website under "[Safe Disposal of Sharps](#)" and on the RHAC website under "[Safe Needle Disposal](#)". The City of London links to information on the MLHU website. In the past, public information had recommended disposing properly packaged used needles and syringes in municipal waste. This practice is no longer recommended.

Moving Forward

The Health Unit, City of London, London CAREs, and the Regional HIV/AIDS Connection are working together toward comprehensive approaches that increase access to safe disposal options, increase NSP return rates, minimize improper disposal of injection equipment and ensure that stray needles and needle debris in the community are dealt with promptly and safely. Strategies will include, but are not limited to, improvements in tracking, enhanced information on safe disposal to people who use injection drugs and the general public, and additional stationary bins.

This report was prepared by Ms. Rhonda Brittan, Public Health Nurse, Oral Health, Communicable Disease and Sexual Health Services.



Christopher Mackie, MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health and CEO

This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Sexual Health, Sexually Transmitted Infections, and Blood-borne Infections (including HIV).
--