ESSENTIAL INFORMATION
July 2017

Syringe Distribution Laws
Prepared by the Policy Surveillance Program Staff

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. This is a longitudinal dataset, and captures laws in effect from July 1, 2012 through July 1, 2017.

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 July 2017.

Some findings from the dataset include:

- In the jurisdictions that prohibit the sale or distribution of drug paraphernalia, 20 states and the District of Columbia have an exception that allows syringe distribution to individuals who participate in a syringe exchange program.

- Of the states that prohibit the sale or distribution of drug paraphernalia, 13 states and the District of Columbia do not define syringes as drug paraphernalia when an individual is participating in a syringe exchange program.

- Eight states have removed syringes from their definition of drug paraphernalia.

NAVIGATING THE DATA

There are two ways to navigate the data by clicking the Filter tab or the Explore tab — for each option, the data can be visualized in a map and table format or in jurisdiction profiles.

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Filter
The dataset homepage will default to the Filter tab. Here, users may answer a series of questions to learn more about the characteristics of the laws. Answering more than one question will show all the jurisdictions that meet the combined criteria. Criteria selected will be listed above the questions, and can be removed by clicking the white X or by clicking “Reset” above the questions.

Explore
Users can access Explore by clicking the Explore tab in the bar above the questions. Using Explore, users will see the answers to one question across all jurisdictions.

The primary questions in this dataset 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?

DISPLAYING THE RESULTS
There are two display modes once criteria have been selected by using either the Filter or Explore tab — Map display mode and Profiles display mode.

Map Display
LawAtlas.org dataset homepages default to the map display mode. When querying the data using the Filter tab, all jurisdictions that meet the criteria selected will display in one tone of yellow. Those jurisdictions that do not meet the criteria selected will be colored gray. When querying the data using the Explore tab, the map will illuminate with colors from yellow to red that are associated with the various answer choices (the color-coding is defined by the key to the left of the map).

Below the map, a table will appear. Using the Filter or Explore tab to navigate the questions will change the display:

- Using the Filter tab, you can select an unlimited number of criteria and the applicable jurisdictions that meet the combined criteria will be displayed in the table below.
- Using the Explore tab, you can isolate a single criterion and the applicable jurisdictions will appear in the table below.

Profiles Display
The Profiles display presents the results of the criteria selected in a text-based format for each applicable jurisdiction. Using the Filter tab, jurisdictions that meet the criteria selected will display. Using the Explore tab, jurisdictions that meet the criterion selected will display. If no criteria are selected, the full profiles for each state will appear under both Filter and Explore.

Profile Legend
Within each Profile box, above the questions and answers, there are additional options and information useful in exploring the law:
Legal Text History – This interactive timeline displays when changes in the law have occurred within a jurisdiction. Using the arrows to the left or right, users may explore how the law has changed over time as new amendments to the law have been enacted. The timeline will change from gray to a shade of yellow when the jurisdiction passed its first relevant law. Each change in the law after that is marked by a break in the timeline.

Map and Profile Legend
There are a few symbols to be aware of in both Map and Profiles display modes:

- **Section Symbol** – Clicking this symbol will open a window that displays excerpts from the law correspond to the question and answer.

- **Caution Note** – Clicking on this symbol will open a small window that displays text that describes important caveats about the question and answer.

**DATASET RESOURCES**
Each dataset homepage includes the following resources available for download:

- **Data**: The Data file exports in CSV. format and may contain two tabs. The “Statistical Data” tab contains the legal variables coded in the dataset, displayed as values defined in the accompanying Codebook. The “Summary Data” tab contains the legal variables coded in the dataset in text form, as well as the accompanying citations and any caution notes that may be included. Note: if there is only one tab available for download it will be the “Statistical Data” as described above.

- **Codebook**: The Codebook defines all of the coded variables in the dataset. The Codebook lists the question, question type, variable name, variable value and variable label. The Codebook should be used in conjunction with the Statistical Data extract.

- **Research Protocol**: The Research Protocol is a comprehensive document that outlines the entire methodology of the project, including the scope, inclusion and exclusion
criteria, data collection methods, definitions, coding scheme decisions, as well as the quality control process.

- Summary Report: The Summary Report provides a snapshot of important findings from the dataset.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Syringe Possession Laws](#) map on LawAtlas.org

This collection of 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 these laws in your state, please contact an attorney in your jurisdiction.