



18th July 2019

Deputy John Curran, TD
Dáil Eireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2.

PQ: 28991/19

To ask the Minister for Health the way in which needle exchange programmes have been expanded during 2019

Dear Deputy Curran,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position:

Needle exchange is one of a number of harm reduction interventions provided by the HSE to reduce the risks associated with injecting drug use. The HSE provide sterile injecting equipment through fixed site exchange, mobile/outreach and pharmacy exchange.

Fixed site exchange and Mobile/Outreach

Fixed site exchanges allow people to collect sterile injecting equipment from a fixed location within fixed opening hours. Delivering equipment from a fixed site allows staff the opportunity to deliver other interventions such as medical care, additional harm reduction programmes, for example safer injecting practices, assessment and referral to services such as housing services based on assessed need.

Mobile or outreach exchange enables the worker to meet the person in a location convenient to the person. This allows equipment exchange to be available to people not in a position to attend a fixed location for a variety of reasons. This method has also been shown to be the most economical form of exchange.

The expansion of sterile injecting equipment provision in CHO 9 (North Dublin City and County) in 2019, includes:

- Two additional two-hour sessions in West Blanchardstown delivered by HSE outreach workers



- One additional session in Corduff delivered by HSE outreach workers
- New mobile service two days per week operating in North County Dublin, delivered by HSE outreach workers. This service will be expanded later in the year in partnership with the North Dublin Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force.
- New service specific to women working in the Benburb Street vicinity delivered by Chrysalis under Section 39 Service Level Agreement.

The expansion of sterile injecting equipment provision in CHO 6 and 7 (Dublin, Kildare and West Wicklow) in 2019, includes:

- In addition to needle provision, increasing availability of other sterile injecting equipment including foil, pipes, mouthpieces, tourniquets and equipment to minimise vein damage, particularly in relation to groin use.
- New mobile service operating in Kildare and surrounding areas from September 2019
- Replacement of fixed site exchanges with outreach exchanges based on local area need

The expansion of sterile injecting equipment provision in CHO 8 (Midlands, Louth and Meath) in 2019, includes:

- Provision of sterile injecting equipment exchange in Navan, Co. Meath by Merchants Quay Ireland outreach workers under Section 39 Service Level Agreement.
- Provision of sterile injecting equipment exchange in Dundalk, Co. Louth by Merchants Quay Ireland outreach workers under Section 39 Service Level Agreement.
- Provision of sterile injecting equipment exchange at the Red Door service in Drogheda, Co. Louth by Merchants Quay Ireland under Section 39 Service Level Agreement.

Pharmacy exchange

Community pharmacy-based needle exchange allows patients to pick up sterile injecting equipment and return used items. Pharmacists can also refer people to appropriate services such as treatment and counselling services; and centres which carry out blood-borne virus testing and hepatitis B vaccinations.

At the end of March 2019, there were 95 pharmacies providing needle exchange, under the National Pharmacy Needle Exchange Programme, across all CHO areas with the exception of areas 6, 7 and 9 covering counties Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow, which continue to be served by a mix of fixed site and mobile/outreach programmes. Although this is a slight reduction in the number of participating pharmacies since 2017, the number of sterile equipment exchanges has not decreased in this same time period.

An average of 25,000 needles were provided monthly to 1,900 individuals each month through pharmacy-based needle exchanges during the first quarter of 2019 (January to March).

Foil for smoking was introduced into pharmacies in late 2017. Data monitoring has shown that there has been a 10% increase in people attending pharmacies who request foil only. In addition, 20% of clients in some areas collect foil as well as injecting equipment.

A full list of services, per county, who provide sterile injecting equipment, can be found on the National Directory of Drug and Alcohol Service on drugs.ie.

The HSE recognise that interventions such as needle exchange and harm-reduction advice promoting sexual health, play an important role in reducing the risk of developing blood-borne viruses such as Hepatitis C and HIV, among vulnerable populations, such as those who are homeless and injecting on the streets. The HSE will continue to work collaboratively with partners in homeless services to deliver interventions to reduce the harm to vulnerable populations.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Doyle', written in a cursive style.

Joseph Doyle
National Planning Specialist