The primary goal of syringe exchange programs is to reduce the spread of blood-borne diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis C (HCV), and injection-related infections among people who inject drugs. A key element of syringe exchange is providing free sterile syringes in exchange for used syringes or needles. In the United States, syringe exchange programs have been a critical component of preventing outbreaks of HIV and HCV for over a decade. There are more than 200 syringe exchange programs operating across the country, including in Utah.

**Syringe Exchange in Utah**

In an effort to reduce the spread of disease in communities across Utah and minimize potential harm to community members from improperly discarded used syringes, legislation outlining a syringe exchange program in Utah was signed into law in 2016. Syringe exchange operations in Utah began on December 1, 2016. Organizations that wish to provide syringe exchange services register with and submit quarterly data to the Utah Department of Health.

In the first six months, syringe exchange operators in Utah have collected and properly disposed of approximately 80,000 used syringes and have connected with hundreds of individual clients. These encounters have enabled operators to provide clients with valuable education about the spread of disease, connect clients with local health resources including disease testing centers, and link interested clients with substance treatment opportunities. As the program progresses and new data are collected, the impact of syringe exchange on new cases of HIV and HCV in communities across Utah will become apparent.

The Utah syringe exchange program provides a health safety net to individuals in the community who are injecting drugs. Currently there are six organizations providing syringe exchange services in communities across Utah. The syringe exchange program and other programs aimed at addressing broader social issues surrounding drug use are essential to effectively help people who inject drugs gain information to make better decisions and improve opportunities for a healthier future.

For more information about syringe exchange in Utah, please contact syringeexchange@utah.gov.

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**Fast facts about the Utah syringe exchange program**

1. Syringe exchange programs must offer all clients
   - Clean, sterile syringes
   - Information on
     * clean injection practices
     * the spread of disease
     * services for substance abuse treatment
     * disease testing
     * overdose prevention and overdose reversal

2. In the six months of 2017, syringe exchange operators have collected and properly disposed of more than 80,000 used syringes gathered during exchanges and community cleanups.