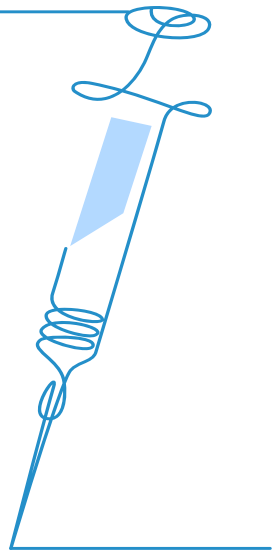


Pharmacy Sales of Syringes without a Prescription



Pharmacists are trusted and accessible healthcare professionals, well positioned to provide North Carolinians with accurate health information and harm reduction tools to reduce the incidence of both overdose deaths and disease transmission. As rates of injection drug use have increased, the transmission of bloodborne infections including viral hepatitis, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and heart infections including endocarditis, have followed a similar trend. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rates of acute hepatitis C virus (HCV) quadrupled from 2009 to 2019, particularly among those aged 20-39 years. In North Carolina, endocarditis rates associated with substance use increased twelve-fold from 2007-2017. Considering these alarming increases, pharmacists should strongly consider the sale of non-prescription syringes, without regard to intended use, in efforts to reduce bloodborne disease transmission, reduce healthcare costs, and improve the lives of North Carolinians.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- 1. Is it legal to sell syringes to someone who doesn't have a prescription?**
Yes. Under North Carolina law, pharmacists may furnish syringes or hypodermic needles to anyone without a prescription.
- 2. Can pharmacists be held liable for selling a syringe to someone who uses it to inject drugs?**
No pharmacist in the United States has ever been sued or prosecuted for selling a syringe that was later used to inject drugs.
- 3. Do I need to collect identifying information from the individual requesting syringes?**
No. Under North Carolina law, there is no requirement for pharmacists to collect an ID to sell syringes.
- 4. Is there a minimum age required to purchase syringes?**
No. There is no legal age requirement for the purchase of non-prescription syringes.
- 5. Is there a limit as to the number of syringes that can be purchased?**
No. There is no limitation on the number of syringes that can be sold at one time.
- 6. What should I do if I suspect a customer may use syringes for injection drug use?**
Under North Carolina law, a pharmacist may choose not to sell syringes to someone whom they suspect will use the syringes for drugs. However, choosing not to sell syringes does not keep the person from using illicit drugs. Instead, it puts them at risk of reusing or sharing syringes, which contributes to the spread of bloodborne diseases like HIV and hepatitis C infection. The best public health decision is to sell syringes regardless of their intended use.

7. Will selling syringes create safety issues at the pharmacy or increase the likelihood that people will inject drugs on the premises?

According to several national studies, the rates of syringes found discarded on or near pharmacy premises did not change after the pharmacies began selling syringes without a prescription. This is particularly true if a large number of pharmacies in a given area are selling syringes.

8. Does selling syringes to people who inject drugs encourage illicit behavior?

No. Choosing to sell or not to sell a syringe to a person who injects drugs does not encourage or increase drug use. NIDA-funded research found that access to sterile needles does not increase drug use, and participants in syringe services programs were significantly more likely to enter substance use treatment and reduce or stop drug use.

9. What resources can be provided to individuals regarding safe disposal of syringes?

North Carolina allows patients to place used sharps (including syringes and needles) in a rigid, leak-proof sharps container or household container such as a laundry detergent bottle, bleach bottle, or other opaque sturdy plastic container with a screw-top lid. When that container is full, inform the patient to place it in the regular garbage and label it as “Do not recycle”. Consult your county waste department for any specific guidance. Alternatively, individuals can be referred to <https://safeneedledisposal.org/> to find a disposal location near them or to their nearest [syringe services program](#).

10. What professional organizations support the sale of non-prescription syringes?

Syringe access is supported by multiple national public health and medical organizations. American Pharmacist Association (APhA): “APhA encourages state legislatures and boards of pharmacy to revise laws and regulations to permit the unrestricted sale or distribution of sterile syringes and needles by or with the knowledge of a pharmacist in an effort to decrease the transmission of blood-borne diseases.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): “CDC supports the needs-based approach to syringe distribution, as the evidence shows that this is the best practice for reducing new HIV and viral hepatitis infections. Restrictive syringe access policies are associated with higher injection risk behaviors and higher rates of HIV and other bloodborne infections.” American Medical Association (AMA): “The American Medical Association strongly supports needle and syringe exchange programs as part of a wider harm reduction approach.”

11. Where else can pharmacists refer individuals for syringes or other harm reduction resources?

All registered syringe services programs in NC provide sterile syringes. You can find your nearest SSP and other overdose prevention resources in your community by visiting: www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/north-carolina-safer-syringe-initiative/syringe-services-program-north-carolina

12. Where can I find more information about resources available in my county, including testing and treatment for hepatitis and HIV?

[The North Carolina Drug User Health Resource Guide](#)

[The North Carolina Viral Hepatitis Program](#)

[The North Carolina Association of Local Health Department \(NCALHD\) Map](#)

[State Laboratory of Public Health \(SLPH\) Hepatitis B and C testing eligibility](#)

