

# Who Purchases Non-Prescription Syringes?

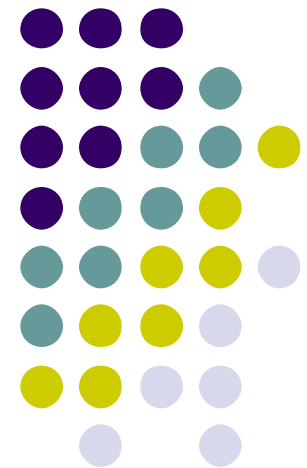
Haven B. Battles<sup>1</sup>, Kirsten A. Rowe<sup>1</sup>, James M. Tesoriero<sup>1</sup>,  
Christina Ortega-Peluso<sup>1</sup>, Guthrie S. Birkhead<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>New York State Department of Health, AIDS Institute

<sup>2</sup>New York State Department of Health, Center for  
Community Health

<sup>3</sup>University at Albany, School of Public Health

Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association,  
Washington, DC, November 5, 2007





# Background

- The primary drug use practice contributing to the spread of the HIV epidemic worldwide is the use of contaminated needles/syringes.
- Access to sterile injection equipment is a critical determinant of risk among injection drug users (IDUs).



# Background

- Expanded access to sterile syringes has been shown to reduce transmission of HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne diseases.
- Syringe access is provided primarily through syringe exchange and pharmacies.
- Over the counter sale of non-prescription syringes is legal in 45 states, however, very little is known about individuals who utilize this service.



# Background: ESAP

- Expanded Syringe Access Demonstration Program (ESAP) was created by NYS Legislature in May 2000, with the purpose of reducing the transmission of blood-borne diseases, including HIV.
- Continues on a demonstration basis:
  - Initially effective from January 1, 2001 through March 31, 2003;
  - Extended through September 1, 2007;
  - Extended through September 1, 2010.



# Background: ESAP

- ESAP permits pharmacies and health care providers to sell or furnish  $\leq 10$  syringes per transaction without a prescription:
  - Customers must be at least 18 years of age;
  - Pharmacies/providers must be registered with the NYS Department of Health;
  - Syringes must be stored behind the counter;
  - Syringes provided through ESAP must be accompanied by a safety insert;
  - Providers may not advertise availability of non-prescription syringes.

# ESAP Logo



# Background: Syringe Access



- Prior to ESAP, syringe exchange programs (SEPs) provided primary access to sterile syringes for IDUs.
- There are 17 legal SEPs in NYS (13 in NYC).
- One of the primary challenges to implementation is the requirement that there be community “buy-in”.

# Background: Added Benefits of ESAP



- ESAP supplements the work of SEPs by providing:
  - Access to sterile syringes in areas not served by SEPs;
  - Expanded access in areas served by SEPs through longer hours of operation, greater number of locations:
    - 17 SEPs with 47 sites;
    - 3,001 ESAP-registered pharmacies.



# Background: Concerns about ESAP



- Embarrassment;
- Cost;
- Fear of arrest.

# Background: Previous Research on ESAP Customers



- Most studies of ESAP utilization identify IDUs in venues where they are thought to congregate (SEPs, treatment settings, street outreach).
- This study represents the first attempt to survey pharmacy customers in the United States at their point of purchase in order to ascertain who is using the program.

# Methods:

## Overall ESAP Evaluation



1. Focus groups with IDUs (2004-05);
2. Statewide survey of pharmacies (2002, 2004, 2006);
3. Statewide survey of residential sharps collection programs (2001, 2004);
4. Pharmacy visits to 180 ESAP-registered pharmacies in 9 cities throughout the state (2005);
5. Survey of Law Enforcement administrators (2005);
6. ***A survey of ESAP pharmacy customers to characterize the individuals who use the program (2006-07).***



# Methods: Sample

- Pharmacies:
  - ESAP-registered pharmacies in Albany and Bronx who were enrolled in ESAP demonstration projects.
- Customers:
  - Any customer who purchased a non-prescription syringe was told that their purchase qualified them for a survey.



# Methods: Procedure

- After purchase, pharmacy staff offered survey;
- Participant returned completed survey to pharmacist in sealed envelope;
- Participants given \$10 gift certificate/voucher to pharmacy.



# Methods: Survey Instrument

- Data Collection Instrument:
  - One page, self-administered, anonymous survey;
  - Approximately 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level;
  - English and Spanish versions available.
- Topics:
  - Reason for purchase;
  - Usual source of syringes;
  - Purchasing patterns;
  - Needle sharing;
  - Usual disposal methods;
  - Demographics.

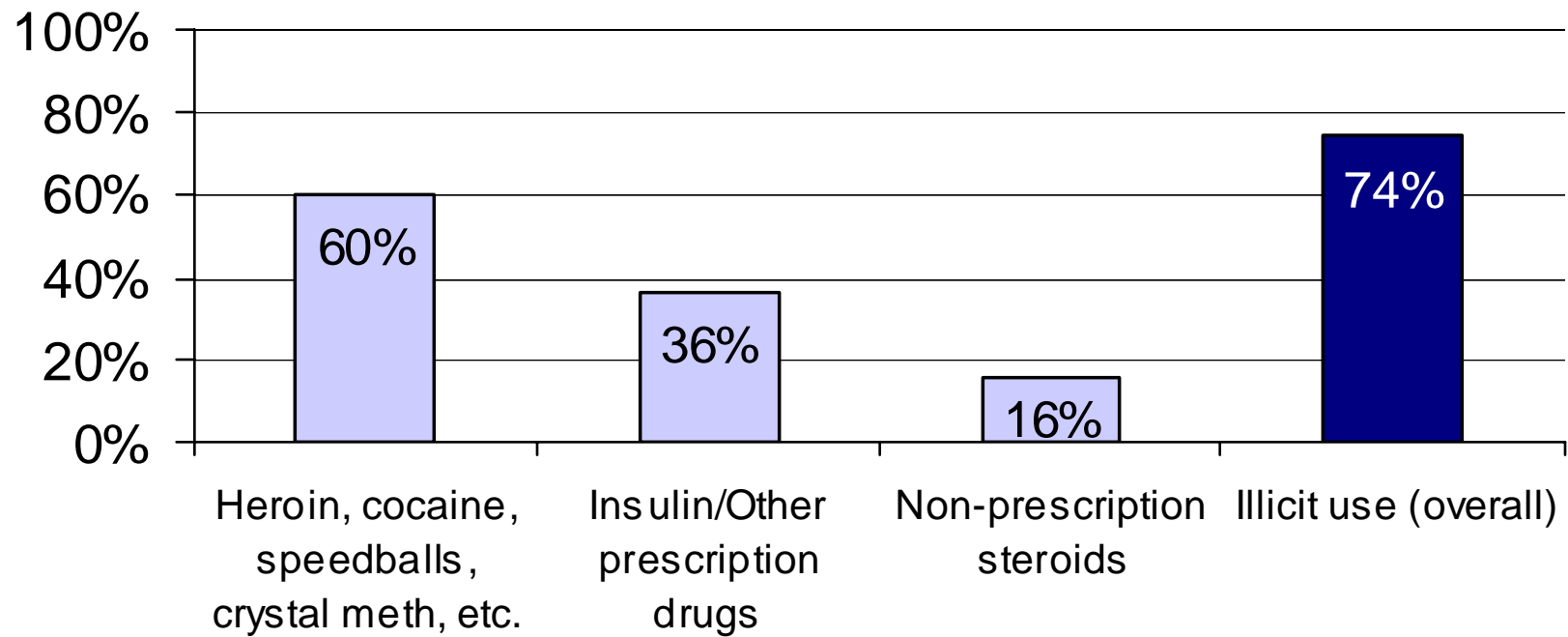


# Sample Characteristics

- Sixty-two customers responded in seven pharmacies in Albany, NY (n=3 pharmacies) and Bronx, NY (n=4 pharmacies):
  - Location: 48% in Albany, 52% in Bronx;
  - Gender: 81% male, 19% female;
  - Race/ethnicity: 45% Hispanic/Latino, 40% white, 13% Black/African American, 2% Native American;
  - Mean age: 36 years (range 18 – 72).



# Reason for Purchase







# Illicit vs. Prescription Use

- Illicit users less likely to be white than prescription users (22% vs. 94%,  $p < .001$ ).
- Illicit users more likely to be Hispanic than prescription users (57% vs. 6%,  $p < .001$ ).
- No difference by gender, age, or Black/African American race.

# Sources of Syringes



How often do you get your syringe from:	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
Pharmacy without prescription	45%	38%	17%
Pharmacy with prescription	14%	14%	72%
Syringe Exchange Program	11%	37%	52%
Partner/family member/friend	13%	44%	44%
Stranger/someone you don't know	6%	14%	80%
Drug dealer	8%	18%	74%

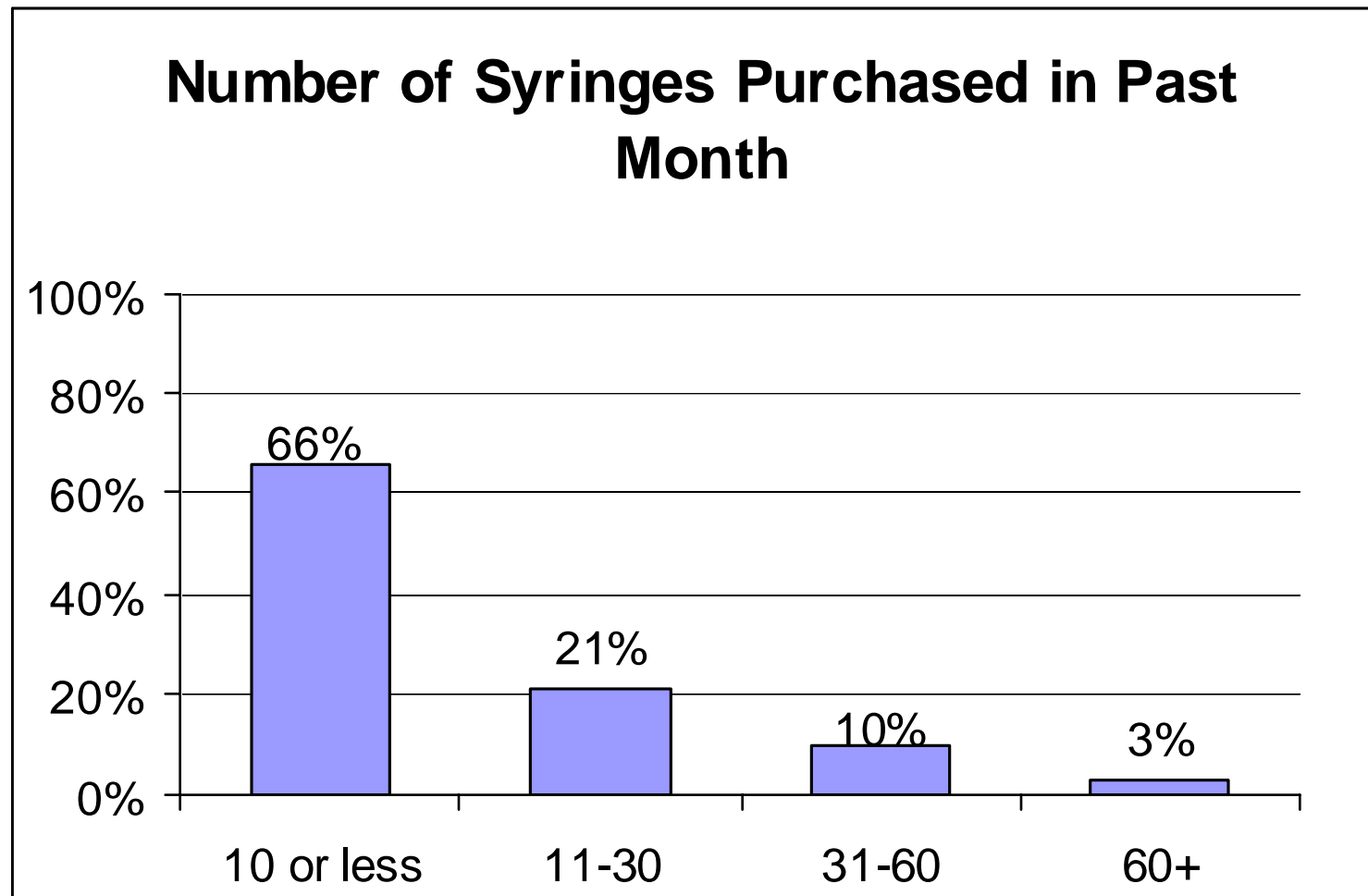


# Source of Syringes

- 26% get their syringes exclusively from pharmacies or SEPs.
- 58% get their syringes from an unsafe source at least “some of the time”.
  - No difference between illicit and prescription users.
  - No differences by race, gender, age.

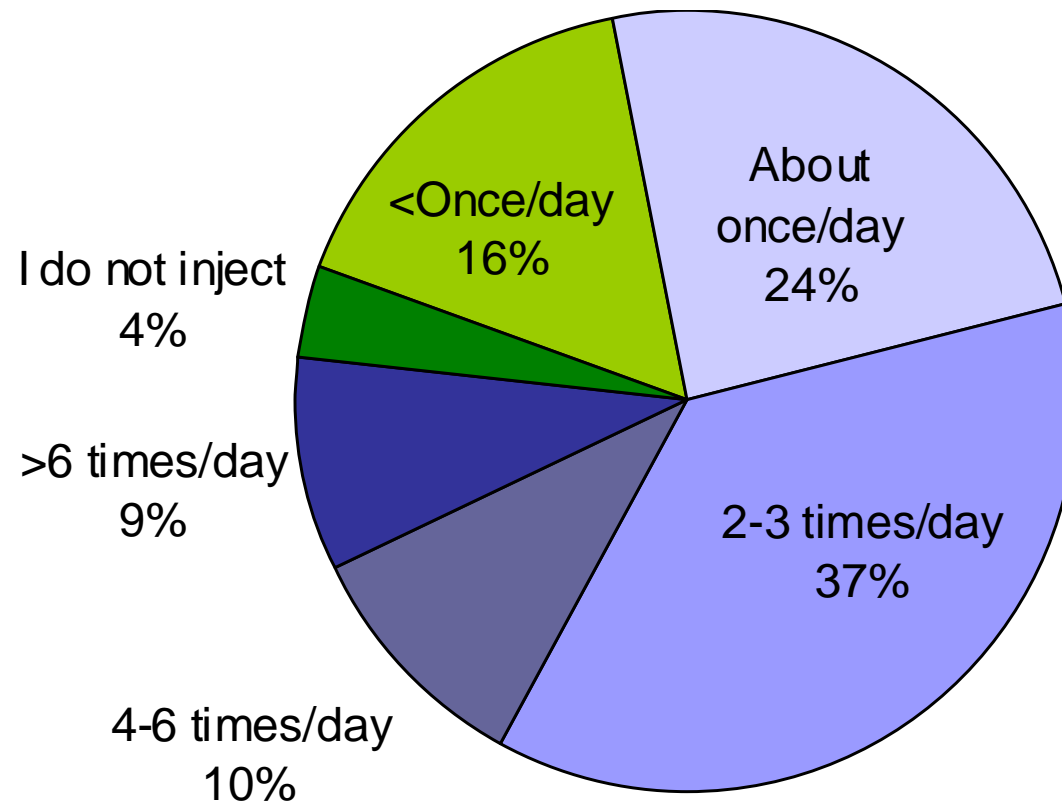


# Volume of Purchases





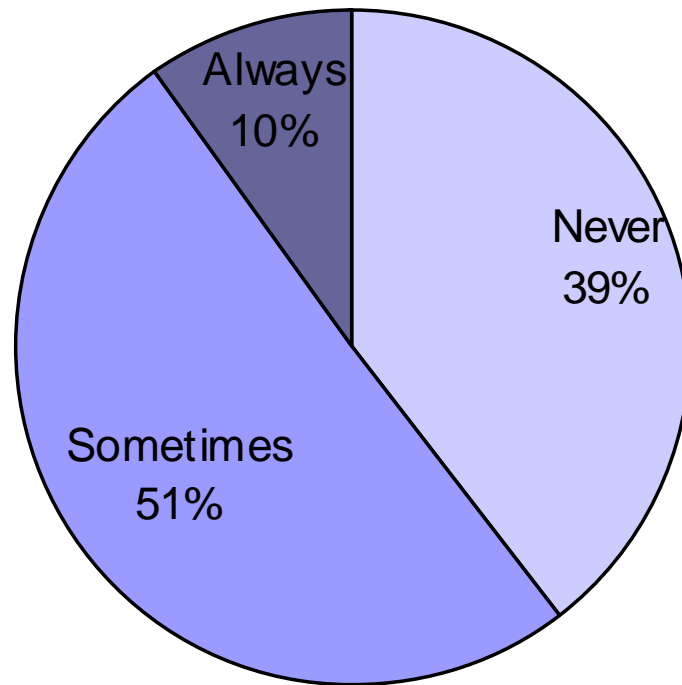
# Injection Frequency



# Syringe Reuse



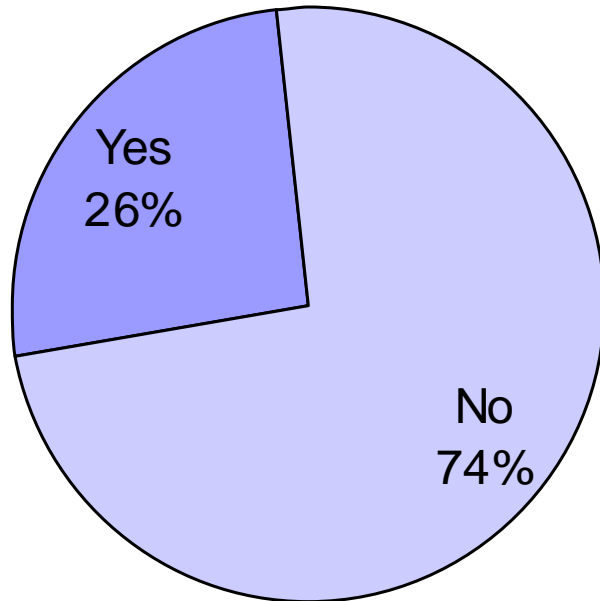
**Do You Use the Same Syringe More than Once?**



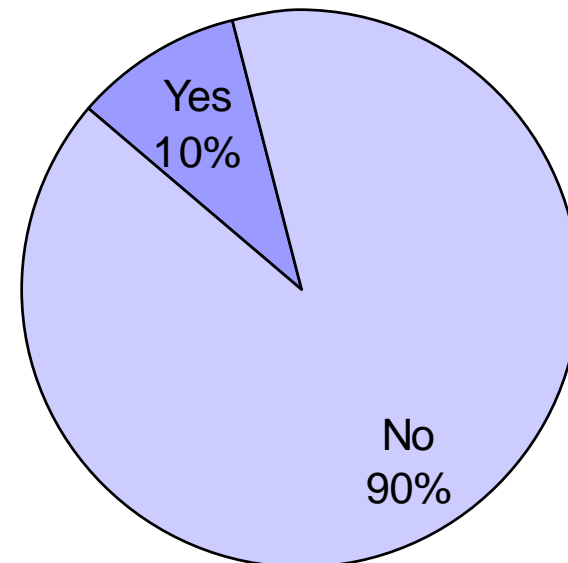
# Syringe Sharing\*



**Ever Shared Syringe?**



**Shared Syringe Past Month?**



\*Among illicit users, 35% had ever shared and 17% shared in the past month.

# Syringe Disposal



What do you do with your needles/syringes when you stop using them?	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
Syringe disposal collection box	37%	26%	37%
Put in medical waste/fitpack container	29%	37%	33%
Other puncture-resistant container	15%	30%	56%
Bring to SEP	14%	26%	61%
Hospital/nursing home/clinic	10%	12%	78%
Throw loose in trash	30%	26%	44%
Toilet or sewer/storm drain	13%	19%	68%
Sell/give them away	4%	14%	82%
Throw on ground	2%	17%	81%



# Syringe Disposal



- 47% engage in safe disposal “most of the time”.
- 65% dispose unsafely at least “some of the time”.
  - Customers who purchased for illicit use more likely to dispose unsafely at least some of the time than those who purchased for prescription use (76% vs. 31%,  $p < .001$ ).
  - Those who get their syringes from an unsafe source at least some of the time are more likely to dispose unsafely than those who never get their syringes from an unsafe source (81% vs. 42%,  $p < .01$ ).
  - No differences by race, gender, age.



# Discussion

- ESAP appears to be functioning as an effective harm reduction program.
- Three quarters of respondents reported purchasing to inject illicit substances.
- Also serving individuals with medical conditions who need non-prescription syringe access.



# Discussion

- Sales levels still low...even customers in ESAP-friendly pharmacies are not purchasing that many (80% injecting at least once a day, only 13% purchasing enough to sustain that at a sterile level).
  - Awareness is likely low, given the ban on advertising;
  - 50% had ever tried to buy a non-prescription syringe a pharmacy in NYS and been refused;
  - IDUs may still be fearful of arrest.



# Discussion

- Large proportion of customers disposing of syringes safely, but room for improvement.
- We know from other components of the evaluation that pharmacists are willing to participate in safe disposal/collection activities, but may not know how to go about it.



# Conclusions

- These data give us an initial snapshot of ESAP customers.
- Demographics roughly reflective of IDUs in NYS overall.
- When ESAP implemented in the spirit in which it was intended, IDUs utilize the program.



# Acknowledgements

- Centro Civico
- VIP Community Services
- Pharmacies and customers in Albany and Bronx who participated
- Funded by CDC Grant # R06/CCR223388

# For more information...



Haven Battles, Ph.D.  
Office of Program Evaluation and Research,  
AIDS Institute  
New York State Department of Health

[hbb01@health.state.ny.us](mailto:hbb01@health.state.ny.us)

518-402-6814