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Supervised Injection Sites  
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## Supervised injection sites on hold

After crucial DOJ announcement of rethinking the sites, still no word on legality



*Parents overdosed with child in back seat. Captured in Ohio in 2016. Courtesy of East Liverpool Police Department.*

CHICAGO – Inside of a sun-drenched conference room, the plants in the windowsills cast a showdown on the opposite wall, vibrating slightly from the buzz of the passing trains at the Fullerton station. Within the room, a group of researchers and students from the DePaul University Community Psychology program gathered discuss the impact of harm reduction on communities, especially supervised injection sites.

“Science supports harm reduction,” stated researcher Alexa Nieder. “From a public health standpoint, intervening is shown to be effective at reducing or mitigating some of those adverse effects of [substance use.]”

To push back against accidental overdose, organizations offer supervised injection sites, a place where people with substance use disorders can use drugs under the watch of clinicians. [Included in these](#) spaces are drug testing kits, sterile supplies, primary care physicians, and withdrawal management services.

Nationally, the leading cause of death for Americans [aged 20-24 is “unintentional injuries,”](#) with most of the incidents being overdose.

“One of the hardest things for [preventing] substance use disorders is working with adolescents,” said Justin Bell, a graduate student working for the Community Research Center at DePaul University. “[Adolescents] tend to believe that they need to use substances in order to fit in. [And] usually that’s the reason why people are starting to use substances.”

In 2021, Cook county predicted that there would be over [2100 deaths from overdose](#), up from 2020’s deaths.

“There’s such an insane amount of misinformation and lack of education surrounding opioid use,” said Nieder. “We know that ignoring the problem and telling people not to use drugs and just leaving it at that is not helpful,” Nieder continued. “telling someone not to do something is not effective in getting them to not do it. So why aren’t we educating and giving young adults specifically but everyone the information that they need, so they can decision that they’re gonna make regardless but make that informed?”

Despite the growing number of overdoses in the U.S., there is only one legal supervised injection site in the United States. The site, located in New York City, has already [prevented upwards of 100 overdoses](#) in its short life.

“Harm reduction can be really beneficial for maybe someone who isn’t ready to try to completely abstain, there’s still safer ways and safer methods that can help,” said graduate student Connor O’Brien. “[Supervised injection sites] give people the opportunity to get access to other resources.”

As a response to the NYC site’s success, the U.S. Justice Department announced in Feb. of this past year that it may shift its’ stance on supervised injection sites, but since that announcement, nothing has been said on the matter.

Illinois Rep. LaShawn Ford said that the DOJ stance was [“long overdue.”](#) Rep. Ford [sponsored a bill](#) to allow for the creation of supervised injection sites, but as of now it is in committee.

Criminal attorney Shay T. Allen agrees that supervised injection sites should be given the green light to operate in the state of Illinois. “Instead of dealing with drug possession as a health issue,

more often than not, they are [dealt with] conviction or jail time,” Allen stated. “I don’t think the law accounts for either [mental and substance use disorders] as very important factors at all.”

“There is a misunderstanding that [addiction] is a moral failing,” said Nieder. “[Americans] don’t realize that an addict can look like anyone.”

In the Chicago area, there are multiple organizations that distribute safe consumption tools. One of these is the Chicago Recovery Alliance, who operate out of a silver van. For the van’s schedule today, check [here](#).

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