

Region also provides naloxone to at-risk drug users

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meeting. Dubbed Exchange Works, the program aims to reduce the spread of blood-borne illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B and C among intravenous drug and steroid users.

Use of the program has steadily increased since 2012. That year, the region handed out 147,871 needles while receiving back 105,604 dirty needles in return.

Last year's data showed program use had nearly doubled in the five years since, with 283,025 needles handed out compared to 222,031 dirty needles collected.

"Needle exchange programs help by modifying many risk-related practices of injection drug users such as reusing and sharing needles," said the region on its website.

"The program is also important because it controls the unsafe disposal of needles in the community (e.g., playgrounds, washrooms) and reduces the risk of blood-borne infections," it adds.

Both needles used for intravenous drug injections and those used for intermuscular steroid injection are available, with 182,506

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-Halton Public Health website

and 100,519 handed out for each last year, respectively.

"As part of this program, outreach workers and public health nurses operate a mobile outreach service in Halton where they exchange used needles for new clean needles, provide health information to clients, distribute condoms and make referrals to drug and alcohol treatment centres,"

The Exchange Works program offers other services including the distribution of alcohol swabs, filters, sterile water and condoms and lube.

Hepatitis A and B vaccinations, HIV testing and sexually-transmitted infection testing are also available through the outreach program and at regionally operated sexual health clinics across the region.

Information on safer injection, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis education, counselling and treatment referrals and crack kits are

also listed as services offered through program on the region's website.

The region also provides naloxone to at-risk drug users, a medication which can temporarily reverse symptoms of an opioid overdose.

From February to May of this year, Halton Health said it handed out 53 nasal spray naloxone kits through its clinics and outreach program to users and their family and friends - 11 of which were provided as replacements for lost or used kits.

"Clients receive training in recognizing the symptoms of an overdose, basic resuscitation skills and instruction in the use of naloxone," said regional staff in its report.

While the report says opioid use and opioid-related hospital visits in Halton have increased over the last decade, both remain lower than the provincial average.

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