

Statistics from the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme: 1 April 2002 – 31 March 2003

This bulletin summarises information on people visiting the Needle and Syringe Exchange Schemes and relates to the twelve-month period ending 31 March 2003. It is the second bulletin reporting on information collected on the operation of the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme (NSES) which began operation in April 2001.

Summary

In Northern Ireland during the twelve month period ending 31 March 2003:

- There were 6,043 visits to participating pharmacies by users of the scheme.
- Over three fifths (61%) of these visits involved exchanges, whereby a client returned used equipment.
- There were 67,516 syringes and 66,266 needles issued.
- Over four fifths (84%) of all visits were made by male clients.
- Over half (55%) of all visits were made by clients aged 30 or under.
- Just under 1 in 20 visits (5%) were by clients reporting themselves to be new users of the NSES.
- Sixteen (0.3%) visits were by clients reporting to have shared needles.

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1. Background

1.1 Needle Exchange Schemes are a service for injecting drug users, targeted as a harm reduction measure to help limit the spread of blood borne viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis B and C.

1.2 In 2000 funding was made available to develop a free needle and syringe exchange scheme in community pharmacies in Northern Ireland. With input from community pharmacists and other expert advisors, and taking account of models of best practice developed elsewhere, the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme (NSES) was introduced in April 2001.

1.3 Initially five pharmacies were involved in the scheme; by the end of 2002/3 there were eight pharmacies offering needle and syringe exchange. Pharmacies were chosen based on their willingness to participate, their location, and the assessed need for needle exchange in the locality.

2. Data Collection

2.1 Information on transactions involving needles and syringes are collected from participating pharmacies. Administrative input from pharmacy staff is kept to a minimum and statistics are collected at the end of each month. The information is collated within the Department of Health, Social services, and Public Safety by the Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (DAIRU). Prior to January 2003, this function was performed by the Drug and Alcohol Strategy Team (DAST) in the Department.

2.2 Information is collected on the number of visits by clients undertaking a NSES transaction; numbers of needles and syringes issued; returns of used equipment;

and age and gender of the client. As data are collected in an anonymised form –to help underscore confidentiality and thus underpin confidence in the scheme – it is not possible to report directly on the number of individuals using the NSES during the year.

3. Number of visits

3.1 There were 6,043 visits to Needle and Syringe Exchange Schemes in 2002-03 where needles and/or syringes were issued to clients. The vast majority of visits (92%) took place at pharmacies based within the Eastern and Northern Health and Social Services Board areas. The breakdown for the four HSSB areas is as follows:

HSSB Area	Visits (%)
Eastern HSSB	2,773 (45.9)
Northern HSSB	2,767 (45.8)
Western HSSB	490 (8.1)
Southern HSSB	13 (0.2)

3.2 Over three fifths (61%) of the 6,043 visits that were made in 2002-03 were exchanges, whereby a client returned used needles.

4. Number of needles and syringes issued

Syringes

4.1 There were 67,516 syringes issued in 2002-03. The number of syringes issued was highest within the Eastern HSSB area. The figures for HSSB areas were as follows:

HSSB Area	Syringes (%)
Eastern HSSB	29,249 (43.3)
Northern HSSB	27,167 (40.2)
Western HSSB	10,930 (16.2)
Southern HSSB	170 (0.3)

Needles

4.2 The number of needles issued in 2002-03 was 66,266. The breakdown by HSSB area were as follows:

HSSB Area	Needles (%)
Eastern HSSB	28,957 (43.7)
Northern HSSB	26,789 (40.4)
Western HSSB	10,362 (15.6)
Southern HSSB	158 (0.2)

Needle and Syringes issued at Exchange Visits

4.3 Four fifths (80%) of all syringes issued were distributed at visits where a client returned used needles. A similar proportion (81%) of needles were distributed when a client made a return.

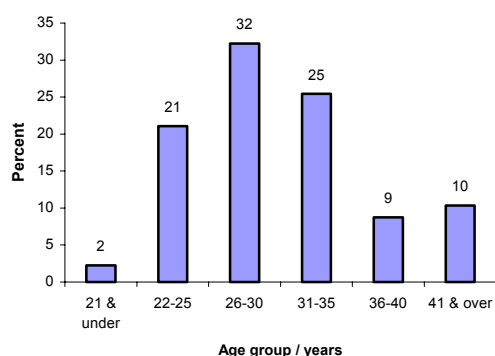
5. Profile of service users

Age and gender

5.1 Over four fifths (84%) of all visits were made by male clients (Table 4).

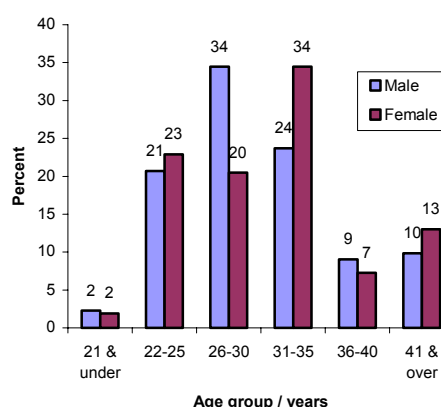
5.2 The mean age of clients using the NSES was 31, with over half (55%) of all visits made by clients aged 30 or under. The modal age group was 26-30, with almost one third (32%) of visits made by this age group (Table 5; Figure 1).

Figure 1. Age of client at each visit: 2002-03



5.3 The age profile for visits by females was slightly older than for males: just over half (54%) of visits by females were by those aged 31 and over, whilst the corresponding figure for males was 43%. Visits by clients in the 26 – 30 year old age band were almost twice as common amongst males than females (34% compared to 20%). In the 31 – 35 year old age band, however, this situation was reversed with just over a third (34%) of females falling into this group compared to about a quarter of males (24%). Visits by clients in the other age bands (21 and under, 22 – 25, 36 – 40, 41 and over) did not show a large gender variation (Table 6; Figure 2).

Figure 2. Age and gender of clients at each visit: 2002-03



New clients

5.4 Just under 1 in 20 visits (5%) were by clients reporting themselves to be new users of the NSES.

Reported sharing behaviour

5.5 Sixteen (0.3%) visits were by clients reporting to have shared needles. This level of sharing is considerably lower than estimates derived from other sources, for example from the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database which reports on drug users presenting for treatment, and is therefore likely to be an underestimate.

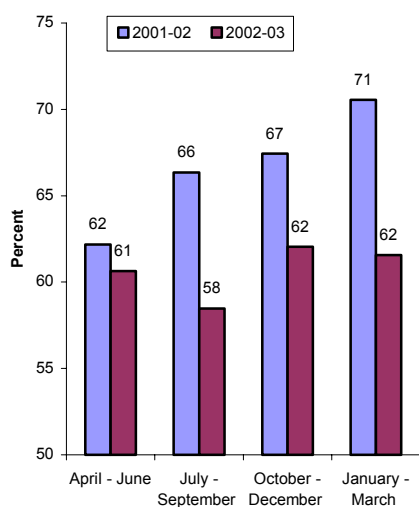
6. Comparisons: 2001-02 and 2002-03

Number of visits

6.1 The number of visits made rose from 5,213 in 2001-02 to 6,043 in 2002-03 (Table 8).

6.2 The overall rate of transactions involving the return of used equipment fell in 2002/2003 to 61% compared to 67% in the previous year. The lowest return rate in 2001-02 was 62% in the April to June quarter, while the highest rate was 71% in January to March. In 2002-03, the return rates ranged from a low of 58% in July to September to a high of 62% in both October to December and January to March (Figure 3; Table 9).

Figure 3. Proportion of visits where a return has been made: 2001-02 and 2002-03



Syringes

6.3 The total number of syringes issued in 2002-03 was 67,516. This is very similar to the 2001-02 figure of 67,989.

Needles

6.4 The total number of needles issued in 2002-03 was 66,266. This figure

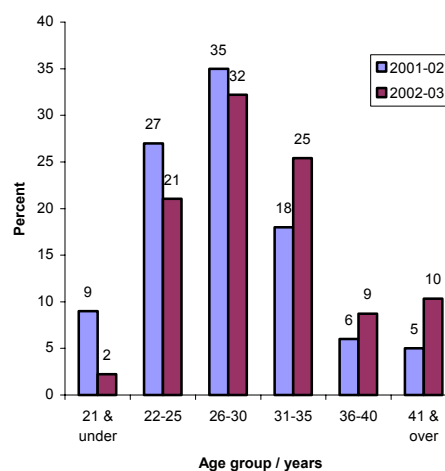
includes needles distributed in pre-packed containers. The figures for 2001-02 do not include pre-packed containers – excluding these, 10,712 needles were issued. The equivalent figure (excluding pre-packed containers) for 2002-03 was 10,865.

Age and gender

6.5 There was an increase in the proportion of visits by women in 2002-03. In 2001-02, 10% of visits were by women. In 2002-03, this had increased to 16% of all visits.

6.6 In 2001-02, almost three-quarters (71%) of visits were by clients aged 30 and under. The corresponding figure in 2002-03 was 56%. In 2002-03 there was a fall in the proportion of visits by clients in each of the following age groups: 21 year olds and under (9% falling to 2%), 22 – 25 year olds (27% to 21%) and 26 – 30 year olds (35% to 32%). There was an increase in the proportion of visits by the following age groups: 31 – 35 year olds (18% increasing to 25%), 36 – 40 year olds (6% to 9%) and 41 and over (5% to 10%) (Figure 4; Table 9).

Figure 4. Age of client at each visit: 2001-02 and 2002-03



New clients

6.7 There were 280 (4.6%) visits by clients reporting themselves to be new

clients. The year 2001/02 was the first year of NSES, therefore every client was essentially a new client.

Sharing behaviour

6.8 Sixteen visits (0.3%) in 2002/03 were by clients reporting to have shared needles. In the previous year there were 36 (0.7%) visits by clients reporting to have shared.

7. Acknowledgements

DAIRU would like to thank the community pharmacists and their staff, the Pharmaceutical Directors within the four HSSB areas and the local Drug and Alcohol Co-ordinators for ensuring the provision of the data reported in this bulletin.

8. Editorial Notes

Percentages do not always add to 100 due to rounding.

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8.1 Further copies of this publication can be obtained from the above address, or on-line at

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/stats&research/pubs.html>

Many other statistical and research reports from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Information and Analysis Directorate, in which DAIRU is structurally located, are available at this web address.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is the principal source of official statistical information about Northern Ireland. Further information is available from the NISRA website at www.nisra.gov.uk or via e-mail at info.nisra@dfpni.gov.uk.

Future publications

This NSES publication will be updated on an annual basis. The next NSES annual bulletin will be published on Tuesday 14 September 2004.

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Table 1. Number of visits: 2002-2003

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Percent
April - June 2002	1631	27
July - September 2002	1310	22
October - December 2002	1684	28
January - March 2003	1418	23
TOTAL	6043	100

Table 2. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment: 2002-2003

numbers and percentages

	Number of return visits	Percent
April - June 2002	989	27
July - September 2002	766	21
October - December 2002	1045	28
January - March 2003	873	24
TOTAL	3673	100

Table 3. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits: 2002-2003

numbers and percentages			
	Number of visits	Number of return visits	Percent
April - June 2002	1631	989	61
July - September 2002	1310	766	58
October - December 2002	1684	1045	62
January - March 2003	1418	873	62
TOTAL	6043	3673	61

Table 4. Gender of clients at each visit: 2002-2003

numbers and percentages			
Quarter	Males	Females	TOTAL
April - June 2002	1419	211	1630
July - September 2002	1107	191	1298
October - December 2002	1372	312	1684
January - March 2003	1171	243	1414
TOTAL	5069	957	6026^(a)

Percentages

April - June 2002	87	13	100
July - September 2002	85	15	100
October - December 2002	81	19	100
January - March 2003	83	17	100
TOTAL	84	16	100

^(a) This figure excludes 17 visits at which the gender of the client was not recorded.

Table 5. Age of clients at each visit: 2002-2003

numbers and percentages							
Quarter	21 & under	22-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41 & over	ALL AGES
April - June 2002	55	365	599	349	131	118	1617
July - September 2002	28	283	388	337	133	125	1294
October - December 2002	26	337	494	457	119	226	1659
January - March 2003	24	272	442	374	138	148	1398
TOTAL	133	1257	1923	1517	521	617	5968 ^(a)
 Percentages							
April - June 2002	3	23	37	22	8	7	100
July - September 2002	2	22	30	26	10	10	100
October - December 2002	2	20	30	28	7	14	100
January - March 2003	2	19	32	27	10	11	100
TOTAL	2	21	32	25	9	10	100

^(a) This figure excludes 75 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

Table 6. Age and gender of clients at each visit: 2002-2003

numbers and percentages

Age group	Male	Female	TOTAL
21 & under	115	18	133
22-25	1036	218	1254
26-30	1723	195	1918
31-35	1184	328	1512
36-40	451	69	520
41 & over	492	124	616
ALL AGES	5001	952	5953 ^(a)

Percentages

21 & under	2	2	2
22-25	21	23	21
26-30	34	20	32
31-35	24	34	25
36-40	9	7	9
41 & over	10	13	10
ALL AGES	100	100	100

^(a) This figure excludes 90 visits at which either the date of birth or gender of the client was not recorded.

Table 7. Number of needles and syringes supplied: 2002-2003

numbers and percentages

Quarter	Syringes supplied	Needles supplied
April - June 2002	18812	17546
July - September 2002	14060	14053
October - December 2002	18654	18652
January - March 2003	15990	16015
TOTAL	67516	66266

Percentages

April - June 2002	28	26
July - September 2002	21	21
October - December 2002	28	28
January - March 2003	24	24
TOTAL	100	100

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Table 8. Number of visits: 2001-2002 and 2002-2003

numbers and percentages

Quarter	2001-02	2002-03
April - June	838	1631
July - September	1278	1310
October - December	1508	1684
January - March	1589	1418
TOTAL	5213	6043

Percentages

April - June	16	27
July - September	25	22
October - December	29	28
January - March	30	23
TOTAL	100	100

Table 9. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits: 2001-2002 and 2002-2003

<u>numbers and percentages</u>				
Quarter	2001-02		2002-03	
	Number of exchanges	Number of return visits	Number of exchanges	Number of return visits
April - June	838	521	1631	989
July - September	1278	848	1310	766
October - December	1508	1017	1684	1045
January - March	1589	1121	1418	873
TOTAL	5213	3507	6043	3673
 <u>Percentages</u>				
April - June	..	62	..	61
July - September	..	66	..	58
October - December	..	67	..	62
January - March	..	71	..	62
TOTAL	..	67	..	61

Table 10. Age of clients at each exchange: 2001-2002 and 2002-2003

numbers and percentages

Age group	2001-02	2002-03
21 & under	485	133
22-25	1428	1257
26-30	1835	1923
31-35	917	1517
36-40	287	521
41 & over	261	617
ALL AGES	5213	5968 ^(a)

Percentages

21 & under	9	2
22-25	27	21
26-30	35	32
31-35	18	25
36-40	6	9
41 & over	5	10
ALL AGES	100	100

^(a) This figure excludes 75 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

Other publications available from the Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit since 2002

Statistical bulletins

NUMBER	TITLE	PUBLISHED
2/2003	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database: 1 April 2002– 31 March 2003	October 2003
1/2003	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database: Six-month update: 1 April – 30 September 2002	May 2003
1/2002	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database: 1 April 2001– 31 March 2002	October 2002

Results from the 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey

Published jointly with the National Advisory Committee on Drugs, Ireland

NUMBER	TITLE	PUBLISHED
Bulletin 1	Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland: First Results from the 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey	October 2003

Research reports

TITLE	PUBLISHED
Review of Research on Substitute Prescribing for Opiate Dependence and Implications for Northern Ireland <i>Dr Karen McElrath</i>	January 2003
Drug and Alcohol Use Among Young People in Northern Ireland: A Secondary Analysis of Drug and Alcohol Use Surveys <i>Robert Miller and Lizanne Dowds</i>	October 2002
Prevalence of Problem Heroin Use in Northern Ireland <i>Dr Karen McElrath</i>	March 2002

Copies of these publications can be obtained on-line at:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/stats&research/pubs.html>