

Statistics from the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme: 1 April 2004 – 31 March 2005

This bulletin summarises information on people visiting Needle and Syringe Exchange Schemes and relates to the twelve-month period ending 31 March 2005. It is the fourth 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 2005:

- There were 7,440 visits to participating pharmacies by users of the scheme. This was broadly consistent with the previous year (7,508 visits).
- The overall rate of transactions involving the return of used equipment fell in 2004/05 to 54% compared to 59% in the previous year.
- There were 86,056 syringes and 79,489 needles issued.
- Almost nine in every ten visits (89%) were made by male clients.
- Just over half (54%) of all visits were made by clients aged 31 and over.
- Just under 1 in 20 visits (4%) were by clients reporting themselves to be new users of the NSES.
- Twelve (0.2%) visits were by clients reporting to have shared needles.

Contents	Page
1. Background	2
2. Data collection	2
3. Number of visits	2
4. Rates of return	2
5. Needles and syringes issued	3
6. Profile of service users	3
7. Comparisons 2003-04 to 2004-05	4
8. Acknowledgements	5
9. Editorial notes	5
Annexes	
A Main tables	7
B Comparative tables 2003-04 and 2004-05	15

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 was introduced in April 2001.

1.3 Initially five pharmacies were involved in the scheme; by the end of 2004/05 there were nine 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 is 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 7,440 visits to Needle and Syringe Exchange Schemes in 2004/05 where needles and/or syringes were issued to clients (Table 1). The vast majority of visits (90%) 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 (%)
Northern HSSB	3883 (52.2%)
Eastern HSSB	2839 (38.2%)
Western HSSB	706 (9.5%)
Southern HSSB	12 (0.2%)

4. Rates of return

4.1 Just over half (54%) of the 7,440 visits that were made in 2004/05 were exchanges, whereby a client returned used needles (Table 3).

4.2 Rates of return varied across health boards. The highest return rate was 92% in the Southern Board (although this is based on a very small number of visits), followed by 78% in Western Board and 61% in the Eastern Board. The lowest rate of return was 44% in the Northern Board (Table 4).

5. Number of needles and syringes issued

Syringes

5.1 There were 86,056 syringes issued in 2004/05 (Table 5). The number of syringes issued was highest within the Northern HSSB area. The figures for HSSB areas were as follows:

HSSB Area	Syringes (%)
Northern HSSB	42,937 (49.9%)
Eastern HSSB	28,836 (33.5%)
Western HSSB	14,133 (16.4%)
Southern HSSB	150 (0.2%)

Needles

5.2 The number of needles issued in 2004/05 was 79,489 (Table 5). The breakdown by HSSB area were as follows:

HSSB Area	Needles (%)
Northern HSSB	42,681 (53.7%)
Eastern HSSB	24,908 (31.3%)
Western HSSB	11,730 (14.8%)
Southern HSSB	170 (0.2%)

Needle and syringes issued at exchange visits

5.3 Seven in ten (70%) of all syringes issued were distributed at visits where a client returned used needles. The same proportion (70%) of needles was distributed when a client made a return.

6. Profile of service users

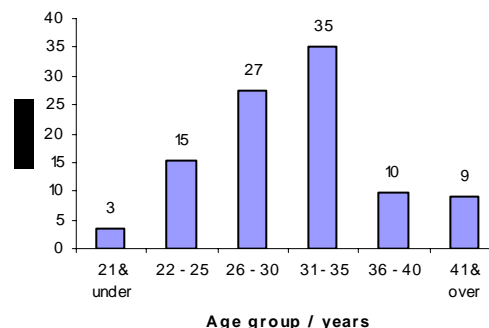
Age and gender

6.1 Almost nine in every ten visits (89%) were made by male clients (Table 6).

6.2 The mean age of clients using the NSES was 31, with just over half (54%) of all visits made by clients' aged 31 and over. The modal age group was 31 - 35,

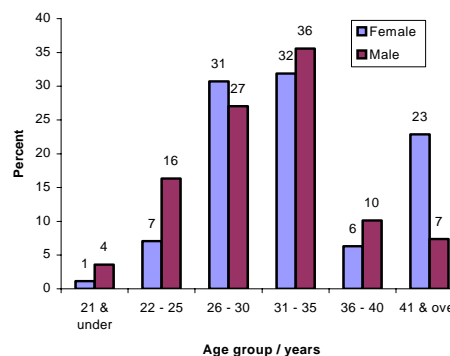
with over one third (35%) of visits made by this age group (Figure 1; Table 7).

Figure 1. Age of client at each visit: 2004-05



6.3 The age profile for visits by females was older than for males: just under a quarter (23%) of visits by females were by those aged 41 and over, whilst the corresponding figure for males was 7%. Among females, 31% of visits were by 26 – 30 year olds, compared to 27% of visits by males. Conversely, in the 21 and under age group, males were 4 times more likely than females to make a visit (4% compared to 1%). Visits by clients in the 36 – 40 year old age band were almost twice as common amongst males than females (10% compared to 6%). This was also true for the 22 – 25 year olds (16% of males compared to 7% of females). In the 31 – 35 year old age band, just over a third (36%) of visits were by males compared to 32% by females. (Figure 2; Table 8).

Figure 2. Age and gender of clients at each visit: 2004-05



New clients

6.4 Just under 1 in 20 visits (4%) were by clients reporting themselves to be new users of the NSES.

Reported sharing behaviour

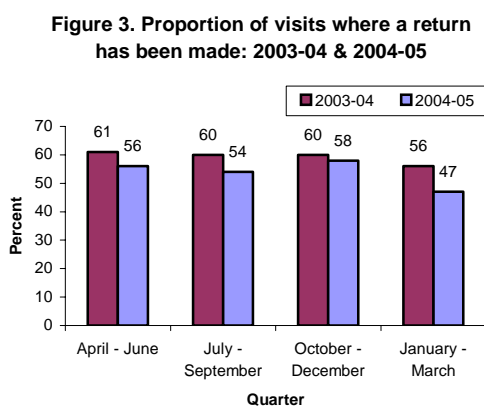
6.5 Twelve (0.2%) visits were by clients reporting to have shared needles. This level of sharing is considerably lower than estimates derived from other sources, for example from the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database which reports on drug users presenting for treatment, and is therefore likely to be an underestimate.

7. Comparisons: 2003-04 and 2004-05

Number of visits

7.1 The number of visits made in 2004-05 was broadly consistent with the number made in 2003-04 (7,508 in 2003/04 compared to 7,440 in 2004-05) (Table 9).

7.2 The overall rate of transactions involving the return of used equipment fell in 2004/05 to 54% compared to 59% in the previous year. In 2004/05, the highest return rate was 58% in the October to December quarter, while the lowest rate was 47% in January to March (Figure 3; Table 10). In 2003/04, the return rates ranged from a low of 56% in October to December to a high of 61% in April – June.



Syringes

7.3 There was a 4% increase in the number of syringes issued from 82,731 in 2003/04 to 86,056 in 2004-05.

Needles

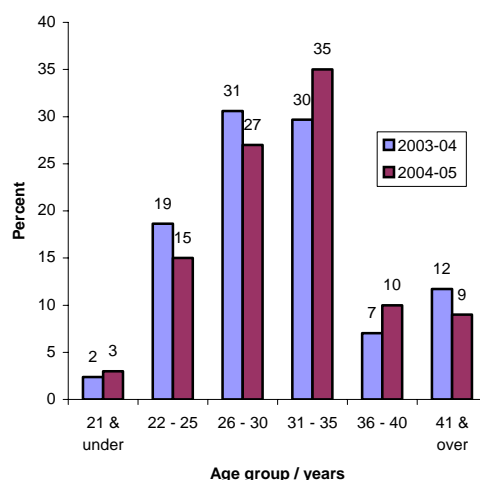
7.4 The number of needles issued fell by 4%, from 82,589 in 2003/04 to 79,489 in 2004-05.

Age and gender

7.5 There was a decrease in the proportion of visits by women in 2004-05. In 2003/04, 17% of visits were by women. In 2004/05, this had decreased to 11% of all visits.

7.6 There was a decrease in the proportion of exchanges by those aged 30 and under (52% in 2003-04 compared to 45% in 2004-05). There was a decrease in the proportion of visits by 22 – 25 year olds (19% in 2003-04 to 15% in 2004-05), 26 – 30 year olds (31% to 27%) and 41 years and over (12% to 9%). There was an increase in the proportion of visits by those aged 21 years and under (2% in 2003-04 compared to 3% in 2004-05), 31 – 35 year olds (30% in 2003-04 and 35% in 2004-05) and 36 – 40 year olds (7% to 10%) (Figure 4; Table 11).

Figure 4. Age of client at each visit: 2003-04 and 2004-05



New clients

7.7 There were 320 (4.3%) visits by clients reporting themselves to be new clients. This was a similar proportion to the previous year where 356 (4.7%) visits were by clients reporting themselves to be new clients.

Sharing behaviour

7.8 Twelve visits (0.2%) in 2004-05 were by clients reporting to have shared needles. This was a similar proportion to 2003/04 where there were 17 (0.2%) visits by clients reporting to have shared.

8. 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.

9. Editorial notes

Percentages do not always add to 100 due to rounding.

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

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

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 12 September 2006.

ANNEX A – TABLES: 2004- 05

TABLE	TITLE	PAGE
Table 1	Number of visits: 2004-2005	8
Table 2	Number of visits involving the return of used equipment: 2004-2005	8
Table 3	Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits: 2004-2005	9
Table 4	Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits in each HSSB area: 2004-2005	9
Table 5	Number of needles and syringes supplied: 2004-2005	10
Table 6	Gender of clients at each visit: 2004-2005	11
Table 7	Age of clients at each visit: 2004-2005	12
Table 8	Age and gender of clients at each visit: 2004-2005	13

Table 1. Number of visits: 2004-2005

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Percent
April - June 2004	1863	25
July - September 2004	1916	26
October - December 2004	1799	24
January - March 2005	1862	25
TOTAL	7440	100

Table 2. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment: 2004-2005

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Percent
April - June 2004	1052	26
July - September 2004	1039	26
October - December 2004	1043	26
January - March 2005	876	22
TOTAL	4010	100

Table 3. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits: 2004-2005

numbers and percentages			
	Number of visits	Number of return visits	Percent
April - June 2004	1863	1052	56
July - September 2004	1916	1039	54
October - December 2004	1799	1043	58
January - March 2005	1862	876	47
TOTAL	7440	4010	54

Table 4. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits in each HSSB area: 2004-2005

numbers and percentages			
	Number of visits	Number of return visits	Percent
Eastern	2839	1727	61
Northern	3883	1724	44
Southern	12	11	92
Western	706	548	78
TOTAL	7440	4010	54

Table 5. Number of needles and syringes supplied: 2004-2005

numbers and percentages

Quarter	Syringes supplied	Needles supplied
April - June 2004	21675	21646
July - September 2004	23470	23527
October - December 2004	21999	20161
January - March 2005	18912	14155
TOTAL	86056	79489

Percentages

April - June 2004	25	27
July - September 2004	27	30
October - December 2004	26	25
January - March 2005	22	18
TOTAL	100	100

Table 6. Gender of clients at each visit: 2004-2005

numbers and percentages

Quarter	Males	Females	TOTAL
April - June 2003	1645	218	1863
July - September 2003	1712	204	1916
October - December 2003	1623	176	1799
January - March 2004	1669	193	1862
TOTAL	6649	791	7440

Percentages

April - June 2003	88	12	100
July - September 2003	89	11	100
October - December 2003	90	10	100
January - March 2004	90	10	100
TOTAL	89	11	100

Table 7. Age of clients at each visit: 2004-2005

numbers and percentages

Quarter	21 & under	22-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41 & over	ALL AGES
April - June 2003	81	318	499	568	179	214	1859
July - September 2003	77	307	538	602	209	181	1914
October - December 2003	55	253	483	704	169	133	1797
January - March 2004	35	264	517	739	165	141	1861
TOTAL	248	1142	2037	2613	722	669	7431 ^(a)

Percentages

April - June 2003	4	17	27	31	10	12	100
July - September 2003	4	16	28	31	11	9	100
October - December 2003	3	14	27	39	9	7	100
January - March 2004	2	14	28	40	9	8	100
TOTAL	3	15	27	35	10	9	100

^(a) This figure excludes 9 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

Table 8. Age and gender of clients at each visit: 2004-2005

numbers and percentages

Age group	Male	Female	TOTAL
21 & under	239	9	248
22-25	1086	56	1142
26-30	1794	243	2037
31-35	2361	252	2613
36-40	672	50	722
41 & over	488	181	669
ALL AGES	6640	791	7431 ^(a)
 <u>Percentages</u>			
21 & under	4	1	3
22-25	16	7	15
26-30	27	31	27
31-35	36	32	35
36-40	10	6	10
41 & over	7	23	9
ALL AGES	100	100	100

^(a) This figure excludes 9 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

ANNEX B – COMPARATIVE TABLES 2003- 04 AND 2004-2005

TABLE	TITLE	PAGE
Table 9	Number of visits: 2003-2004 and 2004-2005	16
Table 10	Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits: 2003-2004 and 2004-2005	17
Table 11	Age of clients at each visit: 2003-2004 and 2004-2005	18

Table 9. Number of visits: 2003-2004 and 2004-2005

numbers and percentages

Quarter	2003-04	2004-05
April - June	1826	1863
July - September	1990	1916
October - December	1796	1799
January - March	1896	1862
TOTAL	7508	7440

Percentages

April - June	24	25
July - September	27	26
October - December	24	24
January - March	25	25
TOTAL	100	100

Table 10. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits: 2003-2004 and 2004-2005

numbers and percentages

Quarter	2003-04		2004-05	
	Number of exchanges	Number of return visits	Number of exchanges	Number of return visits
April - June	1826	1121	1863	1052
July - September	1990	1188	1916	1039
October - December	1796	1082	1799	1043
January - March	1896	1059	1862	876
TOTAL	7508	4450	7440	4010

Percentages

April - June	..	61	..	56
July - September	..	60	..	54
October - December	..	60	..	58
January - March	..	56	..	47
TOTAL	..	59	..	54

Table 11. Age of clients at each exchange: 2003-2004 and 2004-2005

	numbers and percentages	
Age group	2003-04	2004-05
21 & under	177	248
22-25	1396	1142
26-30	2291	2037
31-35	2224	2613
36-40	526	722
41 & over	878	669
ALL AGES	7492 ^(a)	7431 ^(b)
 Percentages		
21 & under	2	3
22-25	19	15
26-30	31	27
31-35	30	35
36-40	7	10
41 & over	12	9
ALL AGES	100	100

^(a) This figure excludes 16 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

^(b) This figure excludes 9 visits at which the client's date of birth was not recorded.

Recent publications available from the Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit

Statistical bulletins

NUMBER	TITLE	PUBLISHED
2/2005	Census of Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services in Northern Ireland: 1 March 2005	September 2005
1/2005	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Drug Addicts Index: 2004	February 2005
	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database: 1 April 2003 – 31 March 2004	October 2004
2/2004	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme: 1 April 2003 – 31 March 2004	September 2004

Results from the 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey

Published jointly with the National Advisory Committee on Drugs, Ireland

NUMBER	TITLE	PUBLISHED
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Bulletin 1	Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland: First Results (Revised) from the 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey	June 2005

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TITLE	PUBLISHED
Drug Use and Risk Behaviours among Injecting Drug Users <i>Dr Karen McElrath and Michele Jordan</i>	January 2005
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Drug and Alcohol Knowledge and Use Amongst Primary School Children <i>Patrick McCrystal and Maeve Thornton</i>	March 2004

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