

Syringe Services in the Time of COVID-19:

Comparing Utah Syringe Services from March to June in 2019-2020

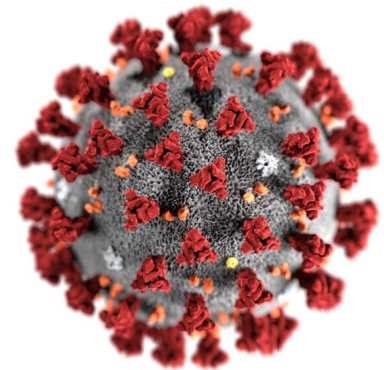


Minor responses to COVID-19 began in early March of 2020, culminating in the governor issuing a Stay at Home Directive for all Utahns at the end of March. The county with one of the highest case counts throughout the pandemic is Salt Lake County, where a large amount of the clients who use syringes services live and work.

In the time from March to June of 2020, syringe service programs acted quickly to adapt to the needs of the community while facing the new normal of providing harm reduction in a pandemic.

Five of the six syringe service providers working with the Utah Department of Health remained operational in some capacity, utilizing personal protective equipment, virtual meetings, and alternative forms of testing for Hepatitis C and HIV.

The following measures have been gathered to better understand the impact COVID-19 has had on syringe services and people who use drugs in the state of Utah.



Syringe Metrics

Syringe service metrics are calculated to determine the reach of program services. Compared to 2019, most metrics have increased in 2020. The increase is due to expansion of syringe services across the state. From 2019 to 2020 the number of syringe service providers has increased from three to six. We believe this consistent growth from last year demonstrates that syringe services are an essential service, that continues to be utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Syringe Metrics 2019

Metric	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Total
Syringes In	41512	45054	40722	40,207	167,495
Syringes Disposed Elsewhere*	997	797	4279	1,482	7,555
Syringes Out	48442	52696	49392	47,694	198,224
Return Ratio**	1.17	1.17	1.21	1.19	1.18
Return Ratio (with disposed)	1.14	1.15	1.14	1.14	1.13
Total Unique Clients Served	489	518	502	519	2,028
Total Encounters	939	1033	970	1030	3972
New Participants	99	86	93	108	386

Metric	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Total
Syringes In	53977	64992	63311	71,167	240,312
Syringes Disposed Elsewhere*	765	370	309	39	1,483
Syringes Out	59960	74295	74042	95,715	304,012
Return Ratio**	1.11	1.14	1.17	1.34	1.14
Return Ratio (with disposed)	1.1	1.14	1.16	1.34	1.14
Total Unique Clients Served	646	776	805	722	3,032
Total Encounters	1193	1515	1448	1670	5305
New Participants	127	168	120	235	650

Syringe Metrics

Between March and June of 2020, syringe service provider enrolled 650 new participants; an increase of 264 compared to the 386 new participants enrolled during the same months in 2019

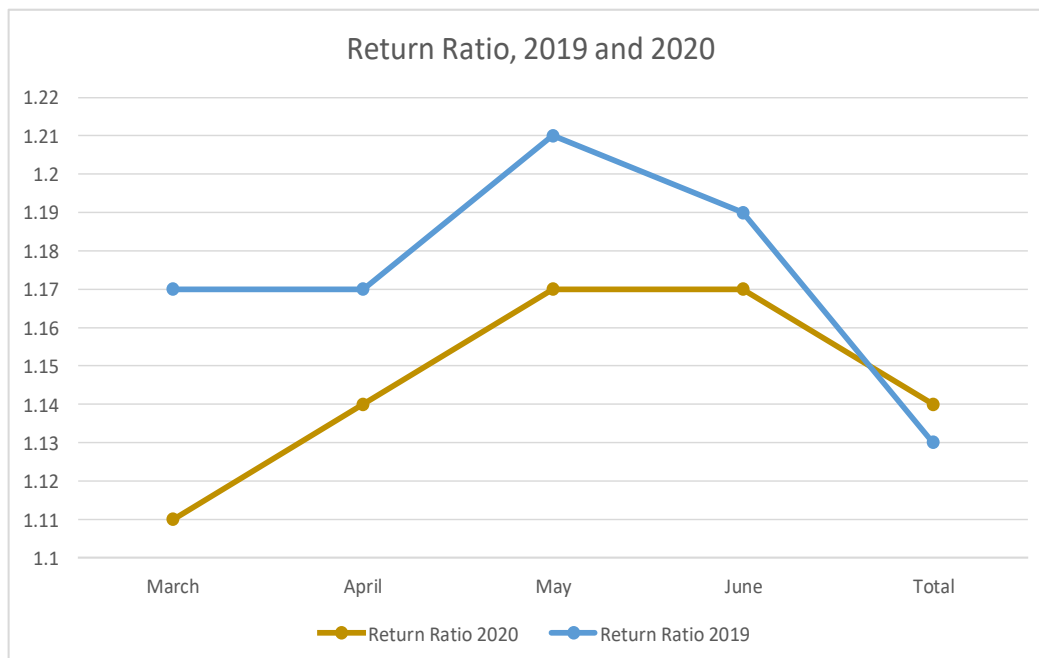
Table 2. Syringe Metrics Comparison

Metric	Total March - June 2019	Total March - June 2020
Syringes In	167,495	240,312
Syringes Disposed Elsewhere*	7,555	1,483
Syringes Out	198,224	304,012
Return Ratio**	1.18	1.14
Return Ratio (with disposed)	1.13	1.14
Total Unique Clients Served	2,028	3,032
Total Encounters	3972	5305
New Participants	386	650

The return ratio syringe metric is calculated by dividing the number of syringes distributed out, by the number of used syringes collected. This ratio is calculated with the number of syringes turned in directly to syringe service providers, and also with that number combined with the number of syringes that are reported to be properly disposed of elsewhere. A ratio closer to one is better, because it indicates that the syringes given out and collected more closely model a one-for-one exchange.

Comparing the total syringe service metrics from March to June of 2019 and 2020 highlights that the return ratio from both years is consistent, and the return ratio from 2020 not including syringes disposed elsewhere is greater than the same measure from 2019. This indicates that among those who utilize the syringe service program, no more syringe waste is being created during the pandemic, and that for every 114 syringes given out by syringe service providers, 100 are returned and disposed of properly.

Figure 1. Return Ratio



Naloxone Distribution

Table 3. Naloxone

Naloxone	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Total
Doses Distributed	240	281	184	238	943
Reversals Reported	14	12	4	8	38

Naloxone	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Total
Doses Distributed	25	264	33	119	441
Reversals Reported	2	1	2	5	10

Naloxone distribution is more difficult to measure change in because of organizational changes. In late 2019, the organization Utah Naloxone became a syringe service provider. While they distribute naloxone themselves and also deliver naloxone to the other five syringe service providers to distribute, those numbers are not measured here. While that change certainly affects these numbers for our program, we do not believe that naloxone distribution has decreased across the state or within our syringe service providers during this time.

Table 4. Naloxone Comparison

Naloxone	Total March - June 2019	Total March - June 2020
Doses Distributed	943	441
Reversals Reported	38	10

Hepatitis C and HIV Testing

The COVID-19 Pandemic's greatest effect on syringe services is the impact on Hepatitis C and HIV testing. Five of the six syringe service providers offer testing, but due to COVID-19 precautions, testing abilities were limited. That effect can be seen here in the table.

Table 5. HCV Testing

HCV Testing*	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Total
Reported HCV positive at intake	14	13	16	17	60
Tested	38	22	26	47	133
Tested Positive	6	4	8	8	26
Positivity Rate	15.80%	18.20%	30.80%	17.0%	19.5%

HCV Testing*	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Total
Reported HCV positive at intake	16	16	18	33	83
Tested	38	9	13	11	71
Tested Positive	5	1	3	5	14
Positivity Rate	13.20%	11.10%	23.10%	45.5%	19.7%

Hepatitis C and HIV Testing

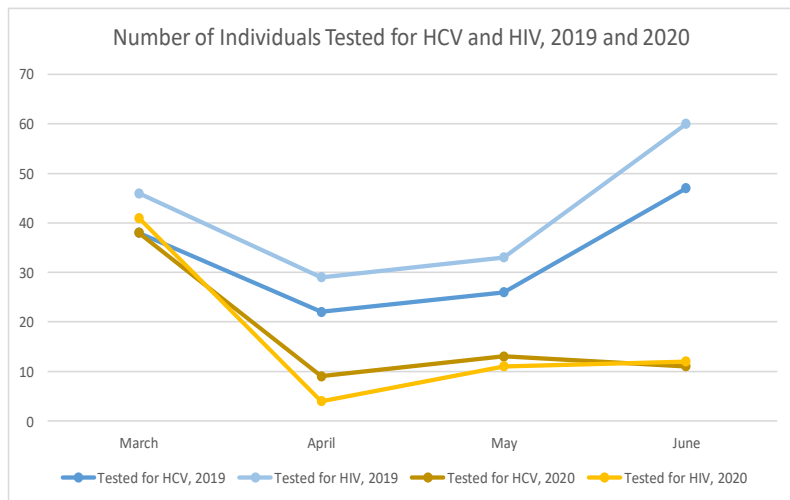
While Hepatitis C and HIV testing has decreased within syringe services, other organizations were able to provide alternative testing methods in June. The Utah AIDS Foundation (UAF) has not had the capacity to support syringe services during the pandemic, but they have recently implemented a program to send at-home testing kits for HIV to community members. Multiple syringe service providers are beginning to use an oral test alternative for Hepatitis C.

Table 6. HIV Testing

HIV Testing	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Total
Reported HIV positive at intake	2	2	0	1	5
Tested	46	29	33	60	168
Tested Positive	1	0	0	1	2
Positivity Rate	2.20%	0.00%	0.00%	1.7%	1.2%

HIV Testing	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Total
Reported HIV positive at intake	1	5	1	1	8
Tested	41	4	11	12	68
Tested Positive	0	1	0	0	1
Positivity Rate	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.0%	1.5%

Figure 2. HCV and HIV Testing



It is interesting to note that while the number of individuals receiving testing has decreased from 2019 to 2020, the positivity rates have remained similar for both Hepatitis C and HIV from last year to this year.

Table 7. HCV and HIV Testing Comparison

HCV Testing*	Total March - June 2019	Total March - June 2020
Reported HCV positive at intake	60	83
Tested	133	71
Tested Positive	26	14
Positivity Rate	19.5%	19.7%

HIV Testing*	Total March - June 2019	Total March - June 2020
Reported HIV positive at intake	5	8
Tested	168	68
Tested Positive	2	1
Positivity Rate	1.2%	1.5%

Drugs Reportedly Used

Data is collected from individuals who use the syringe service program at intake, or return to the program from jail or residential treatment center. Individuals are asked what substances they have used in the past 90 days.

Table 8. Substances

Percentage of Participants who Reported Using each drug at Intake 2019	19-Mar	19-Apr	19-May	19-Jun	Total
Heroin	72.7	75.6	66.7	57.4	67.6
Crack/Cocaine	12.1	9.3	12.9	14.8	12.4
Meth/Speed	63.6	64.0	68.8	65.7	65.5
Cannabis/Marijuana	18.2	17.4	6.5	16.7	17.4
Alcohol	10.1	3.5	6.5	13.0	8.6
Tobacco	10.1	7.0	6.5	16.7	10.4
Benzodiazepines	6.1	5.8	14.0	2.8	7.0
Prescription Pain Medicine	3.0	2.3	5.4	6.5	4.4
Methadone	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.8	2.3
Spice	4.0	2.3	0.0	1.9	2.1
Suboxone	5.1	1.2	2.2	2.8	2.9
Subutex	0.0	0.0	3.2	0.9	1.0
Gabapentin	-	-	-	2.3	0.8

Percentage of Participants who Reported Using each drug at Intake 2020	20-Mar	20-Apr	20-May	20-Jun	Total
Heroin	63.8	62.5	0.8	66.0	66.3
Crack/Cocaine	10.2	32.4	12.5	14.5	12.9
Meth/Speed	83.5	81.5	80.0	72.8	78.5
Cannabis/Marijuana	31.5	29.8	25.0	23.0	26.8
Alcohol	16.5	18.5	18.3	11.5	15.5
Tobacco	17.3	19.6	20.8	8.9	15.5
Benzodiazepines	10.2	1.2	7.5	4.7	5.4
Prescription Pain Medicine	4.7	3.6	2.5	2.6	3.2
Methadone	1.6	1.2	0.8	0.0	0.6
Spice	3.2	6.6	3.3	3.0	4.0
Suboxone	7.9	2.4	0.8	3.0	3.4
Subutex	4.7	1.2	0.8	2.1	2.2
Gabapentin	2.4	1.2	2.5	0.4	1.4

Drugs Reportedly Used

There was an increase in overall substance use from 2019 to 2020, possibly related to other factors and not solely the result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The substances with the greatest percentage change from 2019 to 2020 are graphed here. What is apparent is the increase in individuals reporting using meth or speed. This could indicate an overall increase in stimulant usage or polysubstance use.

Table 9. Substances Comparison

Percentage of Participants who Reported Using each drug at Intake	Total March - June 2019	Total March - June 2019
Heroin	67.6	66.3
Crack/Cocaine	12.4	12.9
Meth/Speed	65.5	78.5
Cannabis/Marijuana	17.4	26.8
Alcohol	8.6	15.5
Tobacco	10.4	15.5
Benzodiazepines	7.0	5.4
Prescription Pain Medicine	4.4	3.2
Methadone	2.3	0.6
Spice	2.1	4.0
Suboxone	2.9	3.4
Subutex	1.0	2.2
Gabapentin	0.8	1.4

Figure 3. Substances Reported at Intake

