

Statistics from the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme: 1 April 2003 – 31 March 2004

This bulletin summarises information on people visiting the Needle and Syringe Exchange Schemes and relates to the twelve-month period ending 31 March 2004. It is the third 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 2004:

- There were 7,508 visits to participating pharmacies by users of the scheme, compared to 6,043 visits in the previous year. A 24% increase.
- The overall rate of transactions involving the return of used equipment fell in 2003/04 to 59% compared to 61% in the previous year.
- There were 82,731 syringes and 82,589 needles issued.
- Over four fifths (83%) of all visits were made by male clients.
- Over half (52%) of all visits were made by clients aged 30 or under.
- There were 356 (4.7%) visits by clients reporting themselves to be new clients.
- Seventeen visits (0.2%) in 2003/04 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 2003/04 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 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 7,508 visits to Needle and Syringe Exchange Schemes in 2003/04 where needles and/or syringes were issued to clients (Table 1). The vast majority of visits (91%) 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	3,461 (46.1)
Northern HSSB	3,377 (45.0)
Western HSSB	651 (8.7)
Southern HSSB	18 (0.3)

4. Rates of return

4.1 Just under three fifths (59%) of the 7,508 visits that were made in 2003/04 were exchanges, whereby a client returned used needles (Table 3).

4.2 Rates of return varied across health board. The highest return rate was 84% in the Southern Board (although this is based on a very small number of visits), followed by 72% in both the Eastern and Western Boards. 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 82,731 syringes issued in 2003/04 (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	35,155 (42.5)
Eastern HSSB	34,170 (41.3)
Western HSSB	13,220 (16.0)
Southern HSSB	186 (0.2)

Needles

5.2 The number of needles issued in 2003/04 was 82,589 (Table 5). The breakdown by HSSB area were as follows:

HSSB Area	Needles (%)
Northern HSSB	35,153 (42.6)
Eastern HSSB	34,011 (41.2)
Western HSSB	13,253 (16.0)
Southern HSSB	172 (0.2)

Needle and Syringes issued at Exchange Visits

5.3 Just over three quarters (78%) of all syringes issued were distributed at visits where a client returned used needles. The same proportion (78%) of needles was distributed when a client made a return.

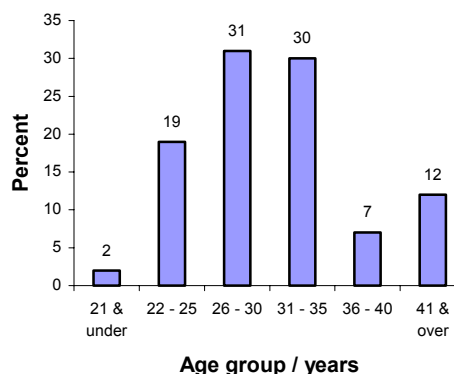
6. Profile of service users

Age and gender

6.1 Over four fifths (83%) of all visits were made by male clients (Table 6).

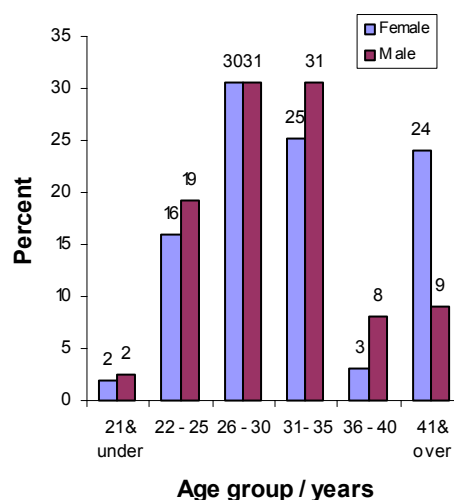
6.2 The mean age of clients using the NSES was 31, with just over half (52%) of all visits made by clients aged 30 or under. The modal age group was 26-30, with almost one third (31%) of visits made by this age group (Figure 1; Table 7).

Figure 1. Age of client at each visit: 2003-04



6.3 The age profile for visits by females was older than for males: just under a quarter (24%) of visits by females were by those aged 41 and over, whilst the corresponding figure for males was 9%. Visits by clients in the 36 – 40 year old age band were almost three times as common amongst males than females (8% compared to 3%). In the 31 – 35 year old age band, just under a third (31%) of visits were by males compared to 25% by females. Visits by clients in the other age bands (21 and under, 22 – 25, and 26 - 30) did not show a large gender variation (Figure 2; Table 8).

Figure 2. Age and gender of clients at each visit: 2003-04



New clients

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

Reported sharing behaviour

6.5 Seventeen (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.

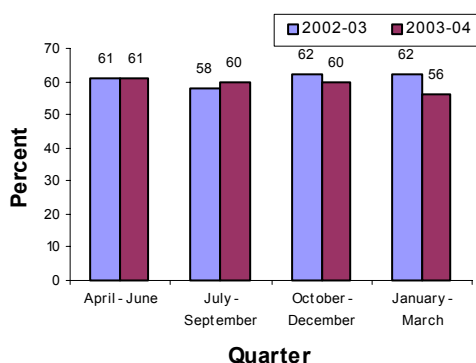
7. Comparisons: 2002-03 and 2003-04

Number of visits

7.1 The number of visits made rose by 24% from 6,043 in 2002-03 to 7,508 in 2003/04 (Table 9).

7.2 The overall rate of transactions involving the return of used equipment fell in 2003/04 to 59% compared to 61% in the previous year. In 2003/04, the highest return rate was 62% in the April to June quarter, while the lowest rate was 56% in January to March (Figure 3; Table 10). 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. Proportion of visits where a return has been made: 2002-03 and 2003-04



Syringes

7.3 There was a 23% increase in the number of syringes issued from 67,516 in 2002/03 to 82,731 in 2003/04.

Needles

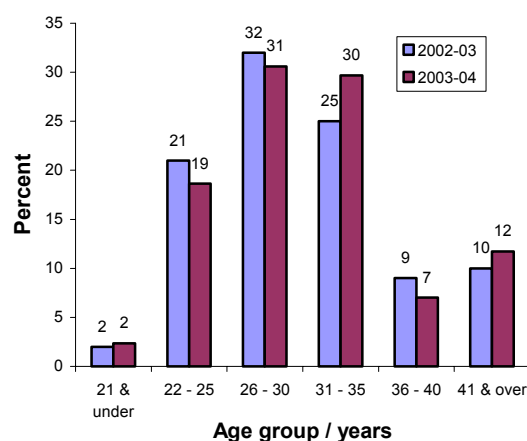
7.4 The number of needles issued increased by 25%, from 66,266 in 2002-03 to 82,589 in 2003/04.

Age and gender

7.5 There was a slight increase in the proportion of visits by women in 2003-04. In 2002/03, 16% of visits were by women. In 2003/04, this had increased to 17% of all visits.

7.6 The general trend in the proportion of visits by each age group this year was generally similar to 2002/03. There were slight falls in the proportion of visits by 22 – 25 year olds (21% in 2002-03 to 19% in 2003-04), 26 – 30 year olds (32% to 31%) and 36 – 40 year olds (9% to 7%). The proportion of visits by those aged 21 and under remained unchanged, while there was a slight decrease in the proportion of visits by those aged 41 years and over. The greatest change was the increase in the proportion of visits by 31 – 35 year olds, from 25% in 2002-03 to 30% in 2003/04 (Figure 4; Table 11).

Figure 4. Age of client at each visit: 2002-03 and 2003-04



New clients

7.7 There were 356 (4.7%) visits by clients reporting themselves to be new clients. This was a similar proportion to the previous year where 280 (4.6%) visits were by clients reporting themselves to be new clients.

Sharing behaviour

7.8 Seventeen visits (0.2%) in 2003/04 were by clients reporting to have shared needles. This was a similar proportion to 2002/03 where there were 16 (0.3%) 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.

Any comments or questions concerning the data contained in this publication, or requests for further information, should be addressed to:

DAIRU
Annex 2
Castle Buildings
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3SQ
Telephone: 028 9052 2908
Fax: 028 90 52 3288
E-mail: DAIRU@dhsspsni.gov.uk

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 13 September 2005.

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Table 1. Number of visits: 2003-2004

numbers and percentages

	Number of visits	Percent
April - June 2003	1826	24
July - September 2003	1990	27
October - December 2003	1796	24
January - March 2004	1896	25
TOTAL	7508	100

Table 2. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment: 2003-2004

numbers and percentages

	Number of return visits	Percent
April - June 2003	1121	25
July - September 2003	1188	27
October - December 2003	1082	24
January - March 2004	1059	24
TOTAL	4450	100

Table 3. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits: 2003-2004

numbers and percentages			
	Number of visits	Number of return visits	Percent
April - June 2003	1826	1121	61
July - September 2003	1990	1188	60
October - December 2003	1796	1082	60
January - March 2004	1896	1059	56
TOTAL	7508	4450	59

Table 4. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits in each HSSB area: 2003-2004

numbers and percentages			
	Number of visits	Number of return visits	Percent
Eastern	3461	2483	72
Northern	3377	1485	44
Southern	19	16	84
Western	651	466	72
TOTAL	7508	4450	59

Table 5. Number of needles and syringes supplied: 2003-2004

numbers and percentages

Quarter	Syringes supplied	Needles supplied
April - June 2003	20470	20448
July - September 2003	21824	21896
October - December 2003	19391	19292
January - March 2004	21046	20953
TOTAL	82731	82589

Percentages

April - June 2003	25	25
July - September 2003	26	27
October - December 2003	23	23
January - March 2004	25	25
TOTAL	100	100

Table 6. Gender of clients at each visit: 2003-2004

numbers and percentages

Quarter	Males	Females	TOTAL
April - June 2003	1496	330	1826
July - September 2003	1646	344	1990
October - December 2003	1481	315	1796
January - March 2004	1575	321	1896
TOTAL	6198	1310	7508

Percentages

April - June 2003	82	18	100
July - September 2003	83	17	100
October - December 2003	83	18	100
January - March 2004	83	17	100
TOTAL	83	17	100

Table 7. Age of clients at each visit: 2003-2004

numbers and percentages							
Quarter	21 & under	22-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41 & over	ALL AGES
April - June 2003	44	354	576	510	119	210	1813
July - September 2003	60	392	609	565	125	236	1987
October - December 2003	30	307	553	552	147	207	1796
January - March 2004	43	343	553	597	135	225	1896
TOTAL	177	1396	2291	2224	526	878	7492 ^(a)
 Percentages							
April - June 2003	2	20	32	28	7	12	100
July - September 2003	3	20	31	28	6	12	100
October - December 2003	2	17	31	31	8	12	100
January - March 2004	2	18	29	32	7	12	100
TOTAL	2	19	31	30	7	12	100

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

Table 8. Age and gender of clients at each visit: 2003-2004

numbers and percentages

Age group	Male	Female	TOTAL
21 & under	151	26	177
22-25	1187	209	1396
26-30	1892	399	2291
31-35	1893	331	2224
36-40	490	36	526
41 & over	570	308	878
ALL AGES	6183	1309	7492 ^(a)

<u>Percentages</u>			
21 & under	2	2	2
22-25	19	16	19
26-30	31	31	31
31-35	31	25	30
36-40	8	3	7
41 & over	9	24	12
ALL AGES	100	100	100

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

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Table 9. Number of visits: 2002-2003 and 2003-2004

numbers and percentages

Quarter	2002-03	2003-04
April - June	1631	1826
July - September	1310	1990
October - December	1684	1796
January - March	1418	1896
TOTAL	6043	7508

Percentages

April - June	27	24
July - September	22	27
October - December	28	24
January - March	23	25
TOTAL	100	100

Table 10. Number of visits involving the return of used equipment as a percentage of the total number of visits: 2002-2003 and 2003-2004

<u>numbers and percentages</u>				
Quarter	2002-03		2003-04	
	Number of exchanges	Number of return visits	Number of exchanges	Number of return visits
April - June	1631	989	1826	1121
July - September	1310	766	1990	1188
October - December	1684	1045	1796	1082
January - March	1418	873	1896	1059
TOTAL	6043	3673	7508	4450
 <u>Percentages</u>				
April - June	..	61	..	61
July - September	..	58	..	60
October - December	..	62	..	60
January - March	..	62	..	56
TOTAL	..	61	..	59

Table 11. Age of clients at each exchange: 2002-2003 and 2003-2004

numbers and percentages

Age group	2002-03	2003-04
21 & under	133	177
22-25	1257	1396
26-30	1923	2291
31-35	1517	2224
36-40	521	526
41 & over	617	878
ALL AGES	5968 ^(a)	7492 ^(b)

Percentages

21 & under	2	2
22-25	21	19
26-30	32	31
31-35	25	30
36-40	9	7
41 & over	10	12
ALL AGES	100	100

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

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

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Statistical bulletins

NUMBER	TITLE	PUBLISHED
1/2004	Statistics from the Northern Ireland Drug Addicts Index 2003	February 2004
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 2	Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland: Health Board (Ireland) & Health and Social Services Board (Northern Ireland) Results	March 2004
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