



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING

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GOVERNOR

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To: Michigan Local Public Health Officers, Medical Directors, the Michigan Association for Local Public Health, Prepaid Inpatient Health Plan Chairs, and the Michigan Prescription Drug and Opioid Abuse Taskforce,

By now you are surely all aware of the devastating effects the opioid and heroin epidemics have had on our communities, particularly as it relates to unintentional drug overdose. Overdose deaths due to opioids and heroin are up more than five-fold in Michigan over the last 15 years. We are encouraged by the strong public health partnerships dedicated to preventing prescription opioid overprescribing and drug overdose in our communities and the work of Governor Snyder's Prescription Drug and Opioid Abuse Taskforce.

However, what often goes underappreciated are the communicable disease risks experienced by Persons Who Inject Drugs (PWIDs). Namely, injection drug use poses a risk of transmission of bloodborne pathogens such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV). An outbreak of HIV and HCV among PWIDs in Scott County Indiana left nearly 200 persons infected with the viruses in 2014-15. A recent CDC study indicated that 11 Michigan counties were at similar risk of rapid dissemination of HIV and/or HCV. Indeed, Michigan has seen a marked increase in both acute and chronic HCV infections among PWIDs, especially in persons less than 30 years old from rural and suburban communities.

It is important to note that syringe service programs (SSPs) have been shown to greatly reduce the risk of transmission of bloodborne pathogens among PWIDs. While four established SSPs do operate in Michigan, more are needed to cover the at risk population. In 2016, a panel of CDC subject matter experts determined that "*Michigan is experiencing an increase in viral hepatitis or HIV infections due to injection drug use*" and that there was "*sufficient evidence to determine a need for SSPs within the jurisdiction*". We urge local municipalities to not overlook this critical public health issue that is inextricably linked to the opioid crisis. Local governments are encouraged to explore the feasibility of operating SSPs within their jurisdictions to reduce the risk of transmission of HIV and/or HCV in their communities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eden Wells MD".

Eden V. Wells, MD, MPH, FACPM  
Chief Medical Executive  
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services