

NYC OKs safe sites for drug use, aiming to curb overdoses

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In this June 19, 2018, photo, a safe needle disposal container hangs in the bathroom of VOCAL-NY headquarters in the Brooklyn borough of New York. The first officially authorized safe havens for people to use heroin and other narcotics have been cleared to open in New York City in hopes of curbing overdoses, the mayor and health commissioner said Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Mary Altaffer

The first officially authorized safe havens for people to use heroin and other narcotics have been cleared to open in New York City in hopes of curbing overdoses, the mayor and health commissioner said Tuesday.

The "overdose prevention centers"—commonly known as supervised injection sites—have been discussed for years in New York and some other U.S. cities and already exist in Canada, Australia and Europe.

A few unofficial facilities have operated in the city for some time, allowing drug users a monitored place to partake.

Proponents say the facilities save lives by recognizing the reality of drug use and providing a place where users are watched for signs of overdoses, which claimed a record number of lives in the city and nation last year.

"I'm proud to show cities in this country that after decades of failure, a smarter approach is possible," Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a statement.

Opponents, however, see the sites as a moral failure that essentially sanctions people harming themselves, and federal law bans operating a place for narcotics use.

The U.S. Supreme Court declined last month to take up a Philadelphia group's fight to open a safe injection site, which a divided federal appeals court had rejected.

The New York sites were opening Tuesday at existing needle exchange programs, city Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi said.



In this July 3, 2018 file photo, Evelyn Milan, right, director of services at VOCAL-NY, prepares a package with sterile injecting equipment for a member at the organization's headquarters in the Brooklyn borough of New York. The first officially authorized safe havens for people to use heroin and other narcotics have been cleared to open in New York City in hopes of curbing overdoses, the mayor and health commissioner said Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021. Credit: AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File

Such sites generally have monitors who watch for signs of overdose and can administer an antidote if needed. Chokshi suggested the facilities also would offer people referrals to drug treatment and other services and "bring people in from the streets, improving life for everyone involved."

More than 2,060 people died of overdoses last year in the nation's most populous city, the most since reporting began in 2000. Nationwide, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [estimates there were more than 93,300](#) overdose deaths in 2020, up nearly 30% from the prior year's number.

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