Nation’s First Safe Injection Sites Could Soon Open in San Francisco

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The first legal safe injection sites in the United States may soon open up in San Francisco, according to a recent announcement from the city’s Department of Health. Local health officials have considered opening up one of the harm reduction facilities for a decade. Now, the city’s board of supervisors has directed the San Francisco Attorney’s Office to provide an in-depth analysis of the potential legal repercussions regarding the establishment of supervised injection sites, which could open up in as little as eight months, The San Francisco Examiner reports.

Safe injection sites — legal locations where drug users can inject heroin and other illicit substances under medical supervision — have been instated in nearly 100 different cities around the world. Advocates say they help curb fatal overdoses and, through education and syringe exchange services, reduce the transmission of blood-borne illnesses such as HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV). They also help cut back on syringe litter and public drug use. However, San Francisco’s proposed sites would be the first available to Americans.

Currently, the possession of controlled substances is prohibited by both state and federal law, which also prohibits building owners and operators from allowing the manufacture, storage, and distribution of drugs.

Those in support of the opening of such sites say the need for the facilities has grown as the United States faces ongoing and overlapping opioid, overdose and hepatitis C crises. The San Francisco board’s request also comes after the Safe Injections Task Force, which met this year between April and September, released its final report recommending the city open up multiple safe injection sites where drug use is prevalent.

In response, Barbara Garcia, director of San Francisco’s Public Health Department said she would start working on an implementation plan, including cost estimates and locations, which could take eight to 12 months after the formal proposal is approved. Garcia said the sites would likely be folded into buildings operated by nonprofits as part of their overall programs.

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