Philadelphia OKs Safe Injection Facility

The city wants to reduce its number of opioid-related deaths.

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Philadelphia is set to house the nation's first safe injection facility, where people who use drugs can inject under medical supervision. The city has the highest rate of opioid overdose deaths among large U.S. cities.

The move is aimed at reducing the number of opioid-related deaths in Philadelphia. Last year, an estimated 1,200 residents died of opioid overdoses, nearly four times higher than the city's homicide rate. Officials did not provide a start date or location for the site but are planning to work with medical and nonprofit organizations to fund, open and operate at least one facility.

Facilities are open in Canada, Australia, Denmark, France, Germany and Norway. At the sites, drug users are provided clean needles to prevent the spread of diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C virus and are supervised by security teams and medical professionals with access to the opioid-reversing drug naloxone. Some programs also steer users to treatment and other services.

The city's decision faces legal hurdles. The Department of Justice has yet to weigh in on Seattle's discussions about opening such a facility. Further, how the federal government will treat safe injection sites in the future—despite President Trump's declaration that opioids are a nationwide public health emergency—remains to be seen.

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