

CLAIM: “As Governor of Indiana, (Pence) provided strong and compassionate leadership to confront an HIV epidemic in Southern Indiana in 2015.”

REALITY: Pence was reluctant to sanction a needle exchange program that experts said would have limited the HIV epidemic in Indiana. When he finally approved the program, Pence did not provide immediate assistance to counties that were already struggling to contain the crisis. Pence’s “strong, compassionate leadership” left counties without funding to address the HIV epidemic, and added burdensome regulations to local governments. Pence’s leadership during the crisis was described by health experts as “not even close to being an appropriate response.”

Mike Pence Was Reluctant To Authorize Needle Exchanges To Combat A Growing HIV Crisis In Indiana...

Politico: “When Confronted With A Spiraling HIV Outbreak In His Home State As A Result Of Opioid Addicts Sharing Contaminated Needles, Pence Dragged His Feet Before Agreeing To Lift A Ban On Programs That Distribute Sterile Needles.” “Indiana Gov. Mike Pence signed a pledge last month, along with most of the nation’s governors, to combat the opioid crisis, calling it ‘one of the deadliest drug epidemics in our nation’s history.’ But when confronted with a spiraling HIV outbreak in his home state as a result of opioid addicts sharing contaminated needles, Pence dragged his feet before agreeing to lift a ban on programs that distribute sterile needles.” [Politico, [8/7/16](#)]

Associated Press On A Surge In HIV Cases In Indiana: “Pence Was Reluctant To Sanction Needle Exchanges That Could Have Limited The Outbreak.” “Pence was reluctant to sanction needle exchanges that could have limited the outbreak. He approved one only after the county’s public health crisis drew widespread attention, and needle exchanges are still allowed only under limited circumstances in a small number of counties.” [Associated Press, [9/1/15](#)]

Associated Press: Pence Approved A Needle Exchange In Indiana “Only After The County’s Public Health Crisis Drew Widespread Attention, And Needle Exchanges Are Still Allowed Only Under Limited Circumstances In A Small Number Of Counties.” “Pence was reluctant to sanction needle exchanges that could have limited the outbreak. He approved one only after the county’s public health crisis drew widespread attention, and needle exchanges are still allowed only under limited circumstances in a small number of counties.” [Associated Press, [9/1/15](#)]

Mike Pence Initially Resisted Calls From Public Health Experts To Lift A Ban On Needle Exchanges During A Surge In HIV Cases In Indiana. “Public health experts from around the country advised immediately lifting the state’s ban on needle exchange programs as a way to stop the spread of the disease — an approach that has proved effective in other places. The governor resisted, but, under enormous pressure, he eventually agreed to a partial lifting of the ban. But critics say the statewide compromise has been ineffective because it offered little financial help to cash-strapped counties and permitted only ‘limited and accountable’ exchange programs, as Pence described it.” [Politico, [8/7/16](#)]

...Agreeing To Do So Only After “Enormous Pressure...”

Mike Pence Only Authorized A Partial Lifting Of Indiana’s Ban On Needle Exchange Programs After He Came “Under Enormous Pressure.” “Public health experts from around the country advised immediately lifting the state’s ban on needle exchange programs as a way to stop the spread of the disease — an approach that has proved effective in other places. The governor resisted, but, under enormous pressure, he eventually agreed to a partial lifting of the ban. But critics say the statewide compromise has been ineffective because it offered little financial help to cash-strapped counties and permitted only ‘limited and accountable’ exchange programs, as Pence described it.” [Politico, [8/7/16](#)]

Indiana Democratic Rep. Patrick Bauer Said Mike Pence Was “Dragged Kicking And Screaming” Into Signing Off On A Limited Response To A Surge in HIV Cases In Indiana. “With new cases mounting, Pence eventually agreed to extend the amnesty in Scott County beyond 30 days and to sign

statewide legislation lifting the state ban on exchange programs. That compromise did not give counties a green light to distribute sterile needles to intravenous drug users, however. Instead, it requires officials from counties experiencing increasing HIV or hepatitis C infections to declare a public health emergency and then submit a plan for state approval to set up needle exchange programs for up to one year. The legislation didn't include any money to assist counties, many of which are rural and already struggling. And it explicitly prohibited using state funds to purchase syringes. 'He was dragged kicking and screaming into signing the bill that we got passed,' said Rep. Patrick Bauer, a Democrat who serves on the public health committee." [Politico, [8/7/16](#)]

...Including An Intervention From The CDC

Mike Pence Only Relented To Doctors Begging Him To Authorize A Needle Exchange Program In Scott County, Indiana After CDC Experts Intervened To Explain The Necessity Of The Program To Pence. "In the weeks leading up to Pence's emergency order, local doctors in Scott County had pleaded with Pence to allow them to start such a program. He relented after CDC experts advised him that such a program was critical to stopping HIV from spreading." [CNHI, [3/31/15](#)]

Mike Pence's "Solution" To Indiana's HIV Crisis Did Not Include Any State Money To Help Local Officials Combat Surging HIV Cases...

2015: Indiana Lawmakers Banned State Funding For Needle Exchanges. "The problem is, lawmakers banned state funding for the exchanges when they legalized them last year, even as Indiana's worst-ever HIV outbreak struck in another county." [Associated Press, [3/27/16](#)]

Politico: The Bill Mike Pence Signed In Response To Indiana's HIV Crisis "Didn't Include Any Money To Assist Counties" That Were Authorized To Set Up Needle Exchange Programs And "Explicitly Prohibited Using State Funds To Purchase Syringes." "With new cases mounting, Pence eventually agreed to extend the amnesty in Scott County beyond 30 days and to sign statewide legislation lifting the state ban on exchange programs. That compromise did not give counties a green light to distribute sterile needles to intravenous drug users, however. Instead, it requires officials from counties experiencing increasing HIV or hepatitis C infections to declare a public health emergency and then submit a plan for state approval to set up needle exchange programs for up to one year. The legislation didn't include any money to assist counties, many of which are rural and already struggling. And it explicitly prohibited using state funds to purchase syringes." [Politico, [8/7/16](#)]

...And Left At Least One County Mired In Red Tape

One Indiana County Waited Nearly A Year For Mike Pence's Administration To Sign Off On A Proposed Needle Exchange To Fight The Spread Of HIV. "Clark County was among the first in Indiana to seek a needle exchange program to combat the county's spread of hepatitis C and the fear of an HIV outbreak. But nearly a year after agreeing to seek state approval, the county is still bogged down in a bureaucratic process. There are several reasons community leaders say the program – which would place a heavy focus on disease testing, resources and treatment referrals – has been stalled. The fate of the exchange is in the hands of the Indiana State Department of Health and now, the Courier-Journal has learned, with Gov. Mike Pence." [Courier-Journal, [7/1/16](#)]

NPR: A Limited Needle Exchange Authorization Bill Signed By Mike Pence In May 2015: "Includes So Much Red Tape That Counties May Have A Tough Time Complying." "In hopes of quelling an HIV outbreak in rural Indiana, the state's legislature this week voted to let any county that can prove it is experiencing a drug-linked outbreak of HIV or Hepatitis C to set up a needle exchange program. Indiana's governor, Mike Pence, says he is 'looking forward to signing it into law.' But critics say the measure that passed Wednesday is watered down, and too limited. It also includes so much red tape that counties may have a tough time complying." [NPR, [5/1/15](#)]

Evansville Courier-Press On Indiana Counties Struggling To Pay For Needle Exchanges: "Many Counties...Have Had To Scramble To Find Money From Nonprofits, Foundations, Donations Or

County Cooffers To Run The Programs. “Legislators approved a law last year allowing counties to request approval for needle-exchange programs in response to the Scott County HIV outbreak — the worst in Indiana history with nearly 190 people infected. Many counties, however, have had to scramble to find money from nonprofits, foundations, donations or county coffers to run the programs, which provide intravenous drug users with clean syringes and collect used ones to reduce needle-sharing and prevent the spread of HIV, hepatitis C and other diseases.” [Evansville Courier-Press, [12/28/16](#)]

Mike Pence Threatened To Veto Bills That Offered A Much Stronger Response To Indiana’s HIV Crisis

Mike Pence Threatened To Veto Legislation That Would Empower Local Health Officials To Authorize Needle Exchange Programs To Combat The Spread Of HIV. “Clere’s measure would take away Pence’s exclusive power to allow a needle exchange program and it would put more control into the hands of local health officials...But Clere’s measure now faces a veto threat from Pence, who’s had a long-standing opposition to needle exchange programs that currently exist in 33 states. Pence has said he opposes them as a part of his ‘anti-drug’ policy but so far has declined to explain why. Last week, in announcing his decision to allow Scott County to implement a needle exchange program under his 30-day emergency order, Pence also threatened to kill any legislative measure that would expand such a program statewide.” [CNHI, [3/31/15](#)]

In The Midst Of A Surge In HIV Cases, Mike Pence Threatened To Veto Any Effort To Authorize Statewide Needle Exchange Programs In Indiana. “Clere’s measure would take away Pence’s exclusive power to allow a needle exchange program and it would put more control into the hands of local health officials...But Clere’s measure now faces a veto threat from Pence, who’s had a long-standing opposition to needle exchange programs that currently exist in 33 states. Pence has said he opposes them as a part of his ‘anti-drug’ policy but so far has declined to explain why. Last week, in announcing his decision to allow Scott County to implement a needle exchange program under his 30-day emergency order, Pence also threatened to kill any legislative measure that would expand such a program statewide.” [CNHI, [3/31/15](#)]

Mike Pence Resisted Legislation That Would Authorize Counties With The Highest Risk Of A Surge In HIV Cases To Set Up Needle Exchange Programs. “In response to the threat, Clere narrowed his proposal to apply only to counties that face the highest risk of an HIV outbreak like the one in Scott County. But even the narrower proposal would face resistance from Pence, according to Joey Fox, Pence’s legislative liaison at the Indiana State Department of Health. Clere’s frustration was evident Monday. ‘I’m not sure where the goal post is now. It seems to keep moving,’ he said.” [CNHI, [3/31/15](#)]

Mike Pence Issued A Temporary Needle Exchange Authorization In One Indiana County Two Months After An Investigation Into Unusually High HIV Infection Rates Started...

January 2015: Indiana’s State Department Of Health Began Investigating A Surge In HIV Cases In Southern Indiana When They Confirmed 11 Cases In One County, More Than Double The Average Reported In A Typical Year. “On January 23, 2015, the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) began an ongoing investigation of an outbreak of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, after Indiana disease intervention specialists reported 11 confirmed HIV cases traced to a rural county in southeastern Indiana. Historically, fewer than five cases of HIV infection have been reported annually in this county. The majority of cases were in residents of the same community and were linked to syringe-sharing partners injecting the prescription opioid oxycodone (a powerful oral semi-synthetic opioid analgesic).” [Centers For Disease Control, [4/24/15](#)]

March 2015: Mike Pence Authorized A 30-Day Needle Exchange Program In One Indiana County. “Gov. Mike Pence Thursday declared the HIV epidemic in southeastern Indiana a public health emergency and gave local authorities the OK to begin a short-term needle-exchange program to help fight an outbreak that now includes 79 cases all linked to intravenous drug use.... His order applies only to Scott County, and it remains up to local authorities there to decide whether they wish to establish such a program under the supervision of the Indiana State Department of Health. The order will last for 30

days, after which the governor would re-evaluate whether to issue another temporary order.” [Indianapolis Star, [3/25/15](#)]

...And Acted Only After Reported HIV Cases Had Climbed Steeply...

February 2015: 30 Cases of HIV Were Reported In Scott County, Indiana. “Many people had viewed HIV as a big-city disease, something that might afflict people in San Francisco or New York. But not in Austin, a small city of about 4,000 people 80 miles south of Indianapolis. Then, in February 2015, the first 30 cases of HIV were reported. By mid-March, the number had climbed to 55. State health officials, the governor and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were looking for answers. Few public health crises have unfolded so rapidly.” [Indianapolis Star, [4/8/16](#)]

March 2015: There Were 79 Reported Cases Of HIV Infection Linked To Intravenous Drug Use In One Indiana County. “Gov. Mike Pence Thursday declared the HIV epidemic in southeastern Indiana a public health emergency and gave local authorities the OK to begin a short-term needle-exchange program to help fight an outbreak that now includes 79 cases all linked to intravenous drug use.... His order applies only to Scott County, and it remains up to local authorities there to decide whether they wish to establish such a program under the supervision of the Indiana State Department of Health. The order will last for 30 days, after which the governor would re-evaluate whether to issue another temporary order.” [Indianapolis Star, [3/25/15](#)]

May 2015: By The Time Mike Pence Signed A Limited Needle Exchange Authorization Bill, More Than 140 Cases Of HIV Were Reported In Southern Indiana. “So far, more than 140 people in southeast Indiana’s Scott County and neighboring Jackson County have tested positive for HIV. Clyde Polly’s son Kevin, in the town of Austin, is one of those people...The outbreak has brought so much unwelcome attention to this town of about 5,000 residents, that Austin officials now tend to answer questions only during a weekly news conference.” [NPR, [5/1/15](#)]

The Number Of HIV Infections Reported In Indiana Leveled Off At About 210 In December 2016
Buzzfeed: **By December 2016, The Number Of HIV Cases In A Single Indiana County Had “Leveled Off To Around 210.”** “Pence eventually allowed Scott County to extend their needle exchange for a year to respond to the public health emergency. As of now, the number of HIV cases in Scott County has leveled off to around 210, a ‘success story’ according to Indiana’s deputy health commissioner, Jennifer Walthall. But Abert, now the director of the newly launched Indiana Recovery Alliance, says that there’s still plenty of reason to worry. ‘I just don’t want it to seem like Scott County was a fluke. It’s a direct result of systemic failure.’” [Buzzfeed, 12/3/16]

Health Experts Described Mike Pence’s Response To Indiana’s HIV Crisis As Woefully Inadequate
Buzzfeed: **“For Many Experts, Pence’s Months-Long Delay In Scott County, And Even The Subsequent Law That Was Signed, Has Become The Case Study For How Misguided Public Health Policies Can Endanger Lives.”** “Pence eventually allowed Scott County to extend their needle exchange for a year to respond to the public health emergency. As of now, the number of HIV cases in Scott County has leveled off to around 210, a ‘success story’ according to Indiana’s deputy health commissioner, Jennifer Walthall...For many experts, Pence’s months-long delay in Scott County, and even the subsequent law that was signed, has become the case study for how misguided public health policies can endanger lives.” [Buzzfeed, 12/3/16]

Yale Global Health Justice Partnership Co-Director Gregg Gonsalves: “Pence Ignored Warning Signs That There Was A Potential For An Infectious Disease Outbreak Of HIV In His State...If An HIV Outbreak Occurred, Nobody Was Going To See It Unless It Was Too Late.” “Some, such as Gregg Gonsalves, co-director of the Yale global health justice partnership, stress the numerous warning signs. In 2011, a cluster of hepatitis C cases in southeastern Indiana alerted health officials to the prescription opioid injection that was sweeping that part of the state...‘Pence ignored warning signs that there was a potential for an infectious disease outbreak of HIV in his state, because hepatitis C had already happened, and then he basically put a bag over his head by closing the Planned Parenthood

site,' Gonsalves told BuzzFeed News. 'If an HIV outbreak occurred, nobody was going to see it unless it was too late.'" [Buzzfeed, 12/3/16]

Rural Center For AIDS/STD Prevention Beth Meyerson Called Mike Pence's Authorization Of A Temporary Needle Exchange Program In March 2015 "Not Even Close To Being An Appropriate Response" To Fighting A Surge In HIV Cases. "Many services beyond the ones the governor has allocated will be needed to have an impact, said Beth Meyerson, co-director of the Rural Center for AIDS/STD Prevention at Indiana University. Nor will a 30-day needle exchange program do much good. 'There's zero evidence to support the governor's proposition. His solution is not based on public health science,' Meyerson said. 'I appreciate the governor's flexibility, but it's not even close to being an appropriate response.'" [Indianapolis Star, [3/25/15](#)]

Mike Pence Distanced Himself From The Idea That Needle Exchange Programs Were Effective Public Health Tools Even As He Authorized A Temporary Program

Mike Pence On Needle Exchanges As A Public Health Tool After Authorizing A Temporary Needle Exchange: "I Don't Believe Effective Anti-Drug Policy Involves Handing Out Drug Paraphernalia."

"Pence said, however, that his actions Thursday did not change his overall view of needle exchange programs, which have been endorsed by the CDC as an effective way to halt the spread of diseases such as HIV and hepatitis B and C. 'I don't believe effective anti-drug policy involves handing out drug paraphernalia,' Pence said, adding that if the legislature sends him a broad-based needle exchange program bill, he will veto it." [Indianapolis Star, [3/25/15](#)]

Mike Pence's Republican Successor As Indiana Governor Pledged To Undo The Limits Mike Pence Had Placed On Needle Exchange Programs In Indiana

January 2017: Mike Pence's Successor As Indiana Governor Pledged To Roll Back Restrictions That Pence Had Placed On Needle Exchange Programs And Allow Local Officials To Authorize Them Without Waiting For State Approval. "Indiana's incoming governor pledged Thursday to roll back some restrictions on needle exchanges that his predecessor, Vice President-elect Mike Pence, signed into law as part of the state's response to its largest HIV epidemic. Republican Eric Holcomb, who takes office next week, said he believes local officials — not the state — should be able to authorize needle exchanges, a move he characterized as a 'prudent step.' Health experts, who criticized Pence's response to the crisis, say exchanges can dramatically curtail deadly outbreaks by allowing intravenous drug users to swap dirty needles for clean ones." [Chicago Tribune, [1/5/17](#)]