

AIDS 3-12  
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# Divided support for needle exchange

Supervisors vote 3-2  
to back Assembly bill

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As needle-exchange programs designed to reduce the spread of AIDS operate behind the scenes and in the shadows of California's crime-ridden cities, the State Legislature has before it a bill that would put the programs on the up and up.

Tuesday, Santa Cruz County supervisors voted to endorse the legislation, Assembly Bill 2610. The vote was not unanimous.

In a cover letter urging his colleagues to endorse the legislation, Supervisor Gary Patton noted that the county's health officer, Dr. Ira Lubell, has said he would like to start a local needle and syringe exchange program. Patton said Lubell believes the program could help slow the transmission of the AIDS virus. Lubell could not be reached for com-

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# Santa Cruz board split on needle swap

## ■ NEEDLES

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ment.

Illegal needle-exchange programs operate in many parts of California, including Santa Cruz County, where police for the most part look the other way.

While supervisors Jan Beautz and Fred Keeley agreed with Patton that AB 2610 should be endorsed by the board, the two conservative supervisors dissented.

Although the bill would, in fact, make needle exchanges legal, Supervisor Walt Symons said that "as long as this is still illegal I intend to vote against it." Symons, a former educator, called for expanded educational efforts to help fight the spread of the deadly disease.

Former police officer Ray Belgard also voted against endorsing the legislation, saying he agreed with Symon.

The AIDS virus can be transmitted easily among drug users who share contaminated needles. Intravenous drug users are the second-largest group at risk of becoming infected with HIV and "are the primary source of heterosexual, female and perinatal transmission in California, the United States and Europe."

The state Office of AIDS reported recently that sharing contaminated needles is one of the main causes of the spread of the disease in California.

Approximately one-third of the AIDS cases reported in the nation as of a year and a half ago were associated with intravenous drug use.

AB 2610, introduced in January by Assemblywoman Vivian Bronshvag, D-San Rafael, would authorize pharmacists, physicians and other designated individuals to establish a pilot program to furnish needles and syringes without prescriptions or permits. California law allows doctors and pharmacists to furnish needles and syringes without a permit or prescription for patients needing to inject insulin or adrenaline.