



ARTICLE: BENZODIAZEPINE USE AND HEPATITIS C SEROCONVERSION IN A COHORT OF PERSONS WHO INJECT DRUGS

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- This study looked at the relationship between benzodiazepine* (BZD) use and hepatitis C (HCV) infection in a Canadian cohort of people who inject drugs (PWID).
- Between May 1996 and November 2013, 440 HCV-negative PWID in Vancouver were followed; each participant was followed for a median of 38.7 months (~3.2 years).
- Study participants were interviewed on a semi-annual basis to collect information on drug use and other risk behaviours.
- Study samples were collected semi-annually to determine HCV status.

QUICK FACT

***BENZODIAZEPINE USE IS
INDEPENDENTLY ASSOCIATED
WITH HCV INFECTION AMONG
PWID.***

FINDINGS

- Overall, 158 participants (35.9%) reported prescribed or illicit BZD use, and 142 participants (32.3%) contracted HCV over the course of the study.
- Benzodiazepine use was associated with an elevated rate of HCV infection: over the course of 5 years, the cumulative probability of remaining HCV negative was 50.4% for BZD users and 69.6% for non-BZD users.
- HCV infection rates were 1.67 times higher among PWID who used BZD versus those who did not.
- This effect did not change after controlling for demographic and behavioural factors associated with HCV risk, such as daily or more frequent injection drug use.

IMPLICATIONS

- This study highlights yet another negative consequence of BZD use, underscoring the need to increase awareness regarding safety, risks, and the limited evidence base for use of these medications to treat insomnia, anxiety, and depression.
- Improved physician education in the identification and treatment of BZD misuse, particularly among people who use drugs, must be recognized as a public health priority.
- Collective action is needed to address unnecessary prescription of BZD and potential for drug diversion and illicit use.

* Benzodiazepines are a class of sedative or anti-anxiety medications; common examples include Valium (diazepam), Xanax (alprazolam), Ativan (lorazepam), and Librium (chlordiazepoxide).

Bach P, Walton G, Hayashi K, Milloy MJ, Dong H, Kerr T, Montaner J, Wood E. **Benzodiazepine use and hepatitis C seroconversion in a cohort of persons who inject drugs.** *American Journal of Public Health*, 2016; 106(6): 1067-1072.

