



IMPROVING VANCOUVER'S NEEDLE EXCHANGE SERVICES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF HIV

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- Between 2000 and 2002, the health authority in Vancouver changed its syringe exchange policies to try to make it easier for people who inject drugs to get clean syringes.
- Program changes included:
 - Getting rid of the "one-for-one" (no clean syringe without a used one) exchange rule,
 - Spreading distribution sites out around a wider area,
 - Using a greater variety of distribution methods, and
 - Involving local drug users in the distribution of clean syringes.
- We did a study to see if these policy changes had any effect on syringe sharing and HIV infection.
- Over a period of 6 years, we interviewed more than 1,200 people in the Vancouver area who use injection drugs.
- We asked them about their syringe sharing habits, and we monitored them for new HIV infections.

FINDINGS

- Following the syringe exchange policy changes:
 - Rates of syringe borrowing dropped significantly (from 20% in 1998 down to 9% in 2003),
 - Rates of syringe lending also dropped dramatically (from 19% in 1998 to 7% in 2003), and
 - At the same time, fewer people became infected with HIV.
- We found that these effects were clearly linked to the policy change even after taking into account other factors that influence syringe sharing and HIV infection.

QUICK FACT

*BETTER ACCESS TO SYRINGES LED
TO LESS SHARING OF SYRINGES
AND LESS HIV INFECTION AMONG
LOCAL INJECTION DRUG USERS.*

IMPLICATIONS

- One-for-one syringe exchange policies are too restrictive. Programs should focus on unrestricted distribution.
- Increasing the number and variety of syringe distribution sites makes it easier for injection drug users to get clean syringes, which helps prevent syringe sharing and HIV infection.
- Local drug user organizations can help extend the reach and effectiveness of syringe exchange programs. They must be included in the process.

Kerr T, Small W, Buchner C, Zhang R, Li K, Montaner J, Wood E. **Syringe sharing and HIV incidence among injection drug users and increased access to sterile syringes.** *American Journal of Public Health*, 2010; 100(8): 1449–1453.

