

Unlinked Anonymous Prevalence Monitoring Programme



Survey of Injecting Drug Users

Summary of the findings for 2005/06 from the four collaborating centres in Northern Ireland:

For use by DHSSPS, CDSC Northern Ireland, & the collaborating agencies.

The Unlinked Anonymous Prevalence Monitoring Programmes (UAPMP) survey of injecting drug users monitors HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C infection levels in those injectors in contact with specialist services, such as needle exchanges, or on treatment programmes, such as methadone maintenance. It is a voluntary survey where those injectors who agree to participate provide an anonymous saliva sample and complete a brief behavioural questionnaire.

The Sample

1. During 2005/06 there were 312 eligible samples returned from the agencies in Northern Ireland.
2. Of these participating injectors 33 (11%) were aged under 25, 177 (58%) aged 25 to 34, and 93 (31%) aged 35 and over. The median age in Northern Ireland was 31 years, it was 30 years in Wales, and it was 33 years in England.
3. The majority were male, with only 81 (27%) of the participants being female.
4. Of those providing information on their injecting careers, 12% had been injecting for 15 or more years, 17% had been injecting 10-14 years, 44% for 5-9 years and 28% for 0-4 years.
5. Among the 187 who had injected during the 12 months preceding participation 179 (96%) had used opiates and 68 (36%) used stimulants.
6. Among the 92 who had injected during the four weeks prior to participation 88% (75/85) reported heroin as the main drug they had injected.
7. The majority of the participating clients (92%, 269 of 291) were currently receiving either a detox or maintenance drug regime.

Hepatitis C

8. Of the participating injecting drug users, 29% (90 of 312) had antibodies to hepatitis C.
9. The majority, 91% (267 of 292), reported having ever had a voluntary confidential test for hepatitis C.
10. More than two thirds (71%, 57 of 80) of the participating injecting drug users who had antibodies to hepatitis C were aware of their infection.

Hepatitis B

11. Of the injecting drug users who took part in the survey 8% (25 of 312) had antibodies to hepatitis B core antigen.
12. Over two-thirds of the participants (76%, 230 of 304) reported having received one or more doses of the vaccine against hepatitis B. This is higher than in Wales and the majority of regions within England.

HIV

13. Of the injecting drug users who took part in the survey 2% (6 of 312) had antibodies to HIV.
14. Most of the participants (77%, 227 of 296) reported that they had ever had a voluntary confidential test for HIV.

Injecting Behaviour and Access to Services

15. Of those who reported injecting during the four weeks prior to participating in the survey 21% (19 of 90) reported the direct sharing of needles and syringes during those four weeks. This was similar to the proportion reporting sharing in Wales (22%) but lower than in most regions in England.
16. Almost a third (30%, 27 of 91) reported the sharing of injecting equipment other than needles and syringes, such as spoons, filters, and water, during the previous four weeks.
17. Nine in ten clients (275 of 303) had ever used a needle exchange. Of those who had started to inject in the last three years 91% (20 of 22) had ever used a needle exchange.
18. More than half (54%, 160 of 297) had ever been to prison, 28% (43 of 152) reported injecting in prison.
19. In 2006, four in five (107 of 129) reported ever being homeless, and a third (36 of 107) of those who had been homeless reported a period of homelessness during the last year.

Table: Summary Comparison of the Results from the Collaborating Centres within Northern Ireland: 2005/06

	Hollywell in-patient unit	Other Centres
<i>Number of samples returned</i>	175	137
Proportion male	75%	71%
Proportion under 25	14%	7%
Proportion with antibodies to hepatitis B core antigen	3.4%	14%
Proportion with antibodies to hepatitis C	17%	45%
Proportion with antibodies to HIV	0.6%	3.6%
Proportion ever having had a voluntary confidential test for HIV	67%	89%
Proportion ever having had a voluntary confidential test for hepatitis C	95%	87%
Ever used a needle exchange	90%	92%
Accepted offer of at least one dose of the hepatitis B vaccine	89%	58%
<i>Number who had injecting in previous 4 weeks</i>	52	39
Proportion sharing needles and syringes in previous 4 weeks	13%	32%
Proportion sharing other injecting equipment in previous 4 weeks	17%	46%