Reducing the Frequency of Needle Sharing Can Help Prevent HCV

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Harm reduction programs that seek to discourage the sharing of drug injection equipment can also lower the risk of hepatitis C virus (HCV) acquisition by encouraging less frequent sharing, aidsmap reports. Publishing their findings in PLOS ONE, researchers in New South Wales, Australia, studied 92 prisoners who inject drugs, testing them for hep C every six months and asking them about their injection behaviors. The study ran between 2005 and 2012.

The participants reported injecting a median of 148 times each year and sharing equipment on 27 of those occasions. Thirty-seven participants (40 percent) acquired hep C during two years of follow-up; all of them reported sharing equipment. Those who contracted the virus injected more and shared equipment more than those who remained HCV negative.

The researchers estimated that each time the participants shared injection equipment there was a 0.57 percent chance of contracting hep C, a rate that might be as low as 0.17 percent when accounting for underreporting of equipment sharing. When sharing equipment with someone who was HCV-positive, the chance of contracting the virus was as high as 6 percent, the investigators estimated.

Because the chance of contracting hep C from shared equipment is apparently small, the researchers concluded that even reducing the frequency of such sharing can help prevent HCV. So can interventions that focus on reducing the risk for each individual injection.

To read the aidsmap story, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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