

Unlinked Anonymous Monitoring Survey of Injecting Drug Users



Summary of the findings for 2009 from the two collaborating services in Northern Ireland:

For use by DHSSPS, CDSC Northern Ireland, & the Collaborating Services.

The Unlinked Anonymous Monitoring (UAM) 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 biological sample and complete a brief behavioural questionnaire.

The Sample

1. During 2009 there were 153 samples returned from the collaborating services in Northern Ireland.
2. Of these participating injectors 7% (9 of 138) were aged under 25, 49% (68 of 138) aged 25 to 34, and 44% (61 of 138) aged 35 and over. The median age in Northern Ireland was 32 years, it was 34 years in Wales, and it was 34 years in England.
3. The majority were male, with only 18% (26 of 147) of the participants being female.
4. Of those providing information on their injecting careers, 16% (15 of 93) had been injecting for 15 or more years, 33% (31 of 93) had been injecting 10-14 years, 24% (22 of 93) for 5-9 years and 27% (25 of 93) for 0-4 years.
5. Among the 89 who had injected during the 12 months preceding participation 85 (96%) had used opioids and 25 (28%) used stimulants.
6. Among those who had injected during the four weeks prior to participation 90% (35 of 39) reported heroin as the main drug they had injected.
7. The majority of the participating clients (95%, 130 of 137) were currently receiving either a detox or maintenance drug regime.

Hepatitis C

8. Of the participating injecting drug users, 28%¹ (26%, 40 of 153) had antibodies to hepatitis C.
9. The majority, 92% (131 of 143), reported having ever had a voluntary confidential test for hepatitis C.
10. Just over half (52%, 16 of 31) of the participating injecting drug users who had antibodies to hepatitis C were aware of their infection.

¹ Anti-HCV prevalence adjusted to allow for the oral fluid test sensitivity of 92%

Hepatitis B

11. Of the injecting drug users who took part in the survey 8.7%² (6.5%, 10 of 153) had antibodies to hepatitis B core antigen.
12. Almost four fifths of the participants (80%, 115 of 144) 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 1.3% (2 of 153) had antibodies to HIV.
14. Most of the participants (92%, 133 of 145) 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 14% (6 of 43) reported the direct sharing of needles and syringes during those four weeks. This was lower than the proportion reporting sharing in Wales (17%) and than in most regions in England.
16. Over a quarter (28%, 12 of 43) reported the sharing of injecting equipment other than needles and syringes, such as spoons, filters, and water, during the previous four weeks.
17. Most of the participants (93% 136 of 147) had ever used a needle exchange.
18. More than half (57%, 82 of 144) had ever been to prison, 18% (14 of 77) reported injecting in prison.
19. In 2009, almost two thirds (62%, 89 of 144) reported ever being homeless.

Table: Summary Comparison of the Results from the Collaborating Services within Northern Ireland: 2009

	Ballymena	Belfast
<i>Number of samples returned</i>	71	82
Proportion male	84%	81%
Proportion under 25	6%	7%
Proportion with antibodies to hepatitis B core antigen	7.5% ²	9.7% ²
Proportion with antibodies to hepatitis C	18% ¹	37% ¹
Proportion with antibodies to HIV	1.4%	1.2%
Proportion ever having had a voluntary confidential test for HIV	91%	92%
Proportion ever having had a voluntary confidential test for hepatitis C	99%	85%
Ever used a needle exchange	94%	91%
Accepted offer of at least one dose of the hepatitis B vaccine	96%	65%
<i>Number who had injecting in previous 4 weeks</i>	22	23
Proportion sharing needles and syringes in previous 4 weeks	14%	14%
Proportion sharing other injecting equipment in previous 4 weeks	36%	19%

² Anti-HBc prevalence adjusted to allow for the oral fluid test sensitivity of 75%.