Hepatitis B and C among people who inject drugs in Germany: High HCV prevalence, low HBV immunization rates, and urgent need for prevention

Results from a multicentre sero-behavioural survey among current injectors 2011-2015

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Background
People who inject drugs (PWID) are a population at high risk for bloodborne and sexually transmitted infections. No representative and recent data on seroprevalence of hepatitis B (HBV), hepatitis C (HCV) and HIV in PWID and effects of current prevention strategies is available in Germany.

Methods

Study design:
- multicentre sero-behavioural survey (6 study sites)
- Data collection 2011 – 2014
- Validation of methods during pilots 2011 in Berlin and Essen

Inclusion criteria:
- Current injectors (having injected drugs during last 12 months and consuming in the city)
- aged 16 years and older

Recruitment:
- In low threshold drug services
- Respondent driven sampling
- Anonymised data

Ross et al., 2012

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Results

Currently consumed substances

Collection of behavioural data
- sociodemographics, used substances, unsafe use, sexual partners and condom use, imprisonment, knowledge, health and infection status, testing history
- by questionnaire-aided interviews
- Trained interviewers

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Conclusions and Recommendations

- High HCV prevalence and low prevalence of HBV vaccination despite official national recommendations to provide HBV vaccination to all PWID indicate the need for intensified prevention strategies, scale-up of targeted vaccination and of antiviral treatment, above all for HCV among PWID.
- High proportions of recent unsafe use behaviours and gaps in specific knowledge of transmission, prevention and treatment options for viral hepatitis were identified.
- Targeted counselling was well accepted and should be regularly offered in low-threshold drug services.
- Regular contact with the medical system during OST should be used more effectively for prevention measures, testing, counselling and referral to treatment.

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