

What Do We Know About People Who Are at Risk of HIV and Inject Drugs?

Texas Department of State Health Services HIV/STD Program

The Big Picture

People who inject drugs (PWID) are at high risk for HIV. With funding from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) sponsors a survey of persons at high risk for HIV called the National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) System. The survey collects information including sexual and drug use behaviors from one of the three populations every year: Heterosexuals at increased risk of HIV infection (HET), Men who have sex with men (MSM) and PWID. DSHS conducts the NHBS surveys in Dallas.

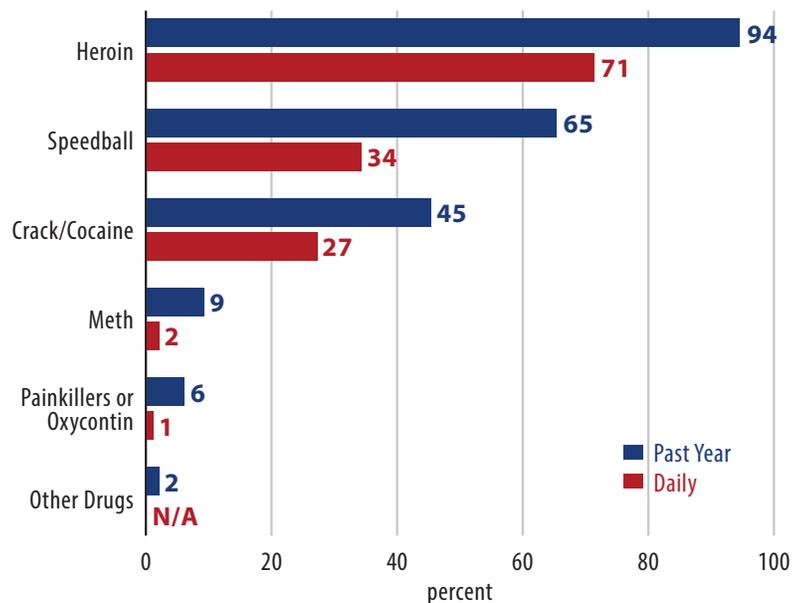
A majority of the eligible PWID (who were HIV-negative) surveyed by NHBS in Dallas in 2009, 2012 and 2015 were male (70%), over 50 years old (66%), and black (78%). A large proportion of respondents reported having obtained a high school education or less (75%), living in poverty (77%), and being incarcerated at least once in their lifetime (71%). About 40% of the PWID surveyed reported they experienced homelessness at least once in their lifetime. Fortunately, the proportion of respondents without any health insurance decreased with each subsequent survey from 2009 to 2015 (67%, 53%, and 48% respectively).

Drugs Used

Across all three years of data collection, heroin, speedball (heroin/cocaine), and crack/cocaine were the top three most frequently injected drugs among the respondents in Dallas. Over 90% of respondents injected heroin during the past year and 71% of them injected daily. About 65% injected speedball during the past year and 34% injected daily. About 45% injected crack/cocaine in the past 12 months and 27% injected daily.

In addition to injection drugs, a large proportion of PWID surveyed reported binge drinking (defined as drinking 5 or more drinks on an occasion for men or 4 or more drinks on an occasion for women) or using non-injection (such as snorting and smoking) drugs. Almost 40% reported binge drinking within past 30 days. In the past 12 months, 45% reported using marijuana, 35% reported using crack, and 33% reported using heroin in the last 12 months.

Drugs Injected Most Frequently by PWID Respondents, Dallas, Texas, 2009, 2012, 2015



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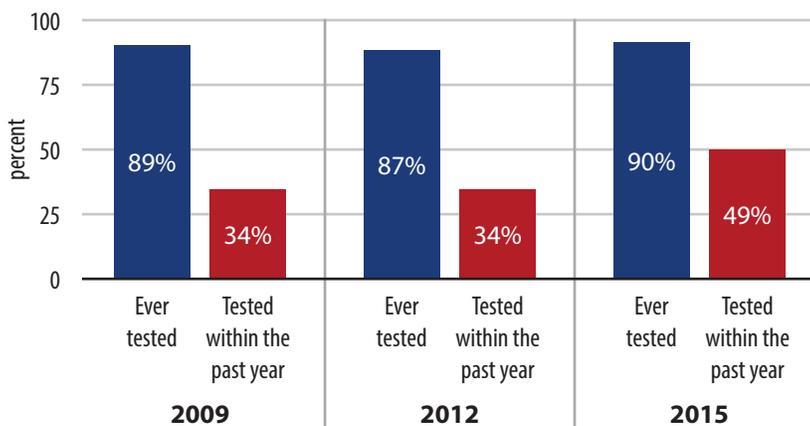
Sharing

A large proportion of the PWID surveyed in Dallas reported having shared injection syringes and other equipment. About 35% of them reported receiving syringes from others in the past 12 months. Over 60% shared injection equipment such as cookers and cotton in the past year. Over 40% shared syringes to divide drugs, and 67% reported sharing of any type of injection equipment in the past year.

HIV Testing

Although most of the respondents surveyed in Dallas reported having been tested for HIV (at least once) (90%), a much lower proportion of them had been tested for HIV in the past 12 months. However, the proportion of respondents who reported having an HIV test in the past year increased from 34% in 2009 and 2012 to 49% in 2015.

HIV Testing Among HIV Negative PWID, Dallas, Texas, 2009, 2012, 2015



Hepatitis C Testing and Screening

Across the three rounds of testing, there was a significant increase in the proportion of the respondents ever being tested for hepatitis C (1-sided $P=0.01$). Among the respondents who were ever tested for hepatitis C in this survey, almost 60% of them were hepatitis C positive.

HIV Prevention

When asked all the places where respondents received sterile needles or syringes, very few of the respondents received sterile needles or syringes and other injection equipment from exchange programs, hospitals, or clinics (< 5%). Forty percent of respondents reported obtaining sterile needles or syringes from a pharmacy or drug store. Less than 25% reported receiving free condoms and less than 12% received prevention services in the past 12 months. This demonstrates the need for prevention services for PWID in Texas.

FACTS TO CONSIDER

Of the 8,724 PWID Texans Living with HIV, 67% were retained in HIV care in 2017. This is slightly less than the 70% of all Texans living with HIV retained in care.

Of the 8,724 PWID Texans Living with HIV, 52% achieved viral suppression in 2017. This is less than the 60% of all Texans living with HIV who achieved viral suppression.

Of the 228 PWID who were newly diagnosed with HIV in Texas in 2017, 184 (81%) were linked to HIV care. This is slightly lower than the 84% of all people newly diagnosed with HIV linked to care in 2017.

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