

PRESS RELEASE
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**EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES
AMONG INJECTION DRUG USERS IN MONTREAL**

Montreal, April 21, 2011 – The results of an epidemiological study at the CHUM Research Centre (CRCHUM) show that injection drug users (IDUs) recruited after 2001 and who obtained all their syringes from Montreal's safe needle distribution network were five times less likely to be infected by HIV than users who obtained their needles elsewhere.

Led by the CRCHUM's Dr. Julie Bruneau, who is also a professor at the *Université de Montréal*, the study confirms the importance of cocaine injection, intensity of injection activities, needle sharing and unstable housing in the HIV epidemic among IDUs. The study also indicates that sexual transmission in this population plays a role, regardless of injection practices.

A needle exchange program since the late 1980s

Montreal was among the first North American cities to set up needle exchange programs in the late 1980s. In contrast to other North American cities, Montreal's IDU population is dispersed in all neighbourhoods rather than concentrated in certain areas, with more than half living outside the downtown core. This geographic distribution complicates matters for prevention and needle distribution programs.

Montreal has one of the most liberal needle distribution programs in North America: needles and injection material are available at CLSCs, an unlimited number of needles can be obtained through needle exchange programs and many pharmacies sell needles at low cost to IDUs. Montreal's Public Health Board (*Direction de la santé publique de l'Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal*) has also adopted measures to continually improve prevention strategies to limit adverse affects.

Good news: reduction of HIV transmission

The study reveals a decrease in the transmission of the AIDS virus among IDUs in Montreal between 1992-2008. Significantly, since 2000, transmission rates have decreased four times faster. "This finding suggests a favourable impact of concerted efforts and the public health programs implemented over the past decade," notes Dr. Bruneau; "however, the persistence of high-risk behaviours in this population also points to the need to continue prevention efforts."

A diversity of means are needed for reaching out to and equipping IDUs, including innovative drug addiction treatment programs.

“The significant reduction of HIV transmission among IDUs constitutes a real, though insufficient step forward, as I noted in my report on sexually transmitted diseases and blood-borne infections published last December,” notes Dr. Richard Lessard, Montreal’s Director of Public Health; “since the early 2000s, HIV transmission does not appear to have decreased and Hepatitis C infection has taken on alarming proportions. During this period, the distribution of injection material has not attained the expected deployment, and for this reason, we have to increase our efforts.”

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Published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, this study was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (United States) and the *Fonds de la recherche en santé du Québec*. The study abstract can be viewed at :

<http://aje.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2011/03/01/aje.kwq479.short?rss=1>

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