

Most crack users in Victoria, Vancouver risk disease by sharing pipes

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(Medical Xpress) -- Most people who smoke or inject crack in Victoria and Vancouver share their crack paraphernaliaa practice—that can spread serious infectious diseases. That’s according to new data from the University of Victoria’s Center for Addictions Research of BC.

Of 273 crack users who were interviewed in late 2010, 70 per cent in Victoria and 60 per cent in Vancouver reported sharing crack pipes. Crack pipe kits are distributed in Victoria in limited numbers but there is no formal distribution program at this time. In addition, among injection [drug users](#) interviewed in Victoria, 20 per cent reported sharing needles in the past year compared to just four percent in Vancouver. These data suggest that needle distribution efforts in Vancouver have been successful, whereas the lack of a fixed site needle distribution program in Victoria may be continuing to hamper needle distribution efforts among active injectors.

“Many people who smoke crack do not inject, therefore distribution of smoking supplies can reduce disease and engage a hard-to-reach population with services,” says Andrew Ivsins, a researcher at UVic’s Centre for Addictions Research. “Also, widespread needle/syringe distribution has been shown to reduce needle sharing and spread of HIV and the provincial harm reduction policy supports the principle that harm reduction supplies should be available to whomever needs them.”

While alcohol, tobacco and marijuana were the most widely used substances among those sampled in both cities, several significant trends

in drug use were noted among illicit drug users during 2010 compared with earlier years. In Victoria, both crack and heroin use have decreased among adults and crystal meth has decreased among youth. Club and party drug users have shown an increase in ecstasy use. In Vancouver, use of alcohol has decreased among drug-using adults while marijuana, crack and crystal meth use has increased among drug-using youth. Club and party drug users have shown an increase in marijuana use and a decrease in alcohol, crack and crystal meth use. These findings illustrate how trends in substance use vary significantly in different population groups and geographic areas.

These results were obtained from the BC Alcohol and Other Drug Monitoring Project, an ongoing surveillance exercise in both cities covering several high-risk populations of substance users as well as data on patterns of substance use and related harms across the whole province. Since January 2008, a total of 1,960 illicit drug users in three different cohorts, street involved adults, street involved youth and recreational club drug users have been sampled in Victoria and Vancouver every six months. Other findings include: continuing increases in hospitalizations caused by alcohol; increased seizures by police of prescription opioid drugs and high prevalence of lifetime cannabis use in BC.

For further data on substance use in BC, visit the Alcohol and Other Drug Monitoring Project website at www.AODmonitoring.ca

Provided by University of Victoria

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