

Dear all

The sharing of contaminated injecting equipments and drug preparation by drug users is one of the most efficient ways of transmitting HIV. Once HIV is introduced into drug injecting network explosive HIV epidemics can occur. The most rapidly spreading epidemic in the world are among injecting drug users. In case of emergency the situation gets even worse and vulnerability increases manifold. Today we are sharing with you a article containing information regarding the prevention methods among Injecting Drug Users in emergency situations.

Injecting Drug Users

Emergency situations have the potential to greatly increase the vulnerability of individuals to drug use and associated HIV infection through a number of mechanisms.

Emergency situations may effect the availability of drugs in the community, for example, drug trafficking is also linked to other criminal activity such as arms trafficking and may be facilitated through civil disruption. Illicit drug production and trafficking may be used to finance arms purchases and conflict. Where drug production and trafficking occur, local drug use usually follows. Usual drug supplies may be interrupted, so drug users may resort to using new drugs, such as changing from opium and heroine smoking to heroine injecting.

Among drug user risk behaviors may be more prevalent in emergency situations. For example sharing of drug injecting equipment may be common in crowded settings such as refuge camps and detention centres, especially when availability of needles and syringes is low. Stress associated with emergency situations increase the vulnerability of individuals to use drug to relieve their symptoms.

The non rational use of injectable opioids for treatment of pain and drug dependence can introduce non injecting users to drug injecting. Intoxication from drug use (including alcohol) can be associated with increase, including sexual behaviour, including sexual abuse. sex work and drug use are also closely linked.

KEY ACTIONS

There are some extremely effective interventions for reducing HIV transmission among IDUs. In most communities injecting drug use is illegal and drug injecting population is stigmatized, marginalized and hidden. There most interventions are controversial and may not be supported by local authorities and the community. In such cases, special attention needs to be given to public education and advocacy to gain support from the community and authorities.

Undertake rapid informal assessment

A rapid situation assessment should be very informal, consisting of discussions with few informants. It is essential to make a brief assessment that will confirm that drug injecting is occurring and to identify the key individuals/groups to target with information, needles and syringes. Care should be taken and disseminating that might be sensitive to general population.

Provide risk information:

Drug users should be provided with the information coverings: modes of HIV transmission, risk associated with sharing drug injecting equipment reducing sharing and drug preparation: strategies for reducing risk associated with injecting.

Ensure access to sterile needles and syringes:

IDUs need to have uninterrupted and ready access sterile injecting equipment where possible. The need of IDUs should be considered when planning the supply of injecting equipment for an emergency setting. A system for collecting and disposing of used injecting equipment is crucial to reduce the circulation times of used equipment in the community.

Provide drug dependence treatment

Where treatment services do exist, health care workers should be made aware of referral channels and procedures.

Provide HIV & AIDS care for IDUs

Drug user should have equitable access to the same HIV&AIDS treatment and care offered to other individuals infected with HIV. There is no justification for excluding drug users from HIV & AIDS treatment.

Prevent sexual transmission of HIV

IDUs should be targeted with safer sex information and education programmes, condom provision and ready access to treatment of sexually transmitted infections

**Source: GUIDELINES for HIV& AIDS in emergency settings.
IASC (Inter Agency Standing Committee)**

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