Vancouver's Supervised Injection Facility Reduces Overdose Deaths

What this study is about

Since opening in September 2003, Vancouver's supervised injection facility (Insite) has provided a safe health-focused centre where people may inject pre-obtained illegal drugs under the supervision of nurses.

Previous studies have shown that Insite:

- Reduces behaviours which cause HIV infection, such as the sharing of used needles
- Increases use of detox and addiction services
- Reduces public disorder caused by injection drug use in public spaces
- Is highly cost effective

Nurses at Insite also assist when there is an overdose, and since the facility opened, no overdose deaths have occurred there. This study was conducted to determine whether the opening of Insite reduced the number of fatal overdoses in the Downtown Eastside.

The study asked:

Did the opening of Vancouver's supervised injection facility have any effect on overdose deaths in the Downtown Eastside?

How the study was conducted

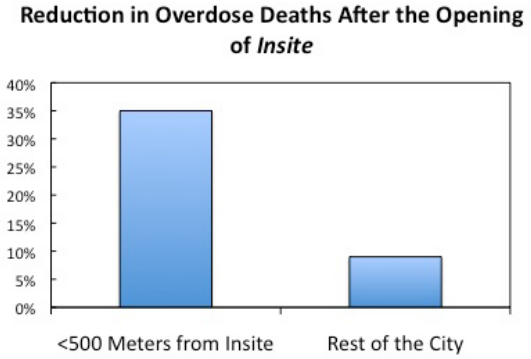
With the assistance of the British Columbia Coroners Service, we collected information on every drug-related overdose death that occurred in Vancouver between 2001 and 2005. We used a technique called *geocoding* to find out where each overdose death occurred in relation to Insite. Then, we compared the number of overdose deaths in the Downtown Eastside before and after the opening of Insite. We also compared the number of overdose deaths in the rest of Vancouver during the same periods.

What the study found

- Between 2001 and 2005, 89 fatal overdoses (a third of all Vancouver overdose deaths) occurred within 500 metres of Insite
- In this area, fatal overdoses decreased by 35% after Insite opened
- By comparison, the number of overdoses in the rest of Vancouver decreased by only 9%

The study found:

Insite has helped reduce overdose deaths in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood.



Implications for policy

- Supervised injection facilities are effective at reducing overdose deaths in communities with high levels of injection drug use
- Programs such as Insite should be considered in other cities where injection drug use and overdose deaths are common
- Closing Insite would likely lead to unnecessary and preventable deaths due to overdose

Marshall BDL, Milloy MJ, Wood E, Montaner JSG, Kerr T. **Reduction in overdose mortality after the opening of North America's first medically supervised safer injecting facility: A retrospective population-based study.** Lancet. Published online April 18, 2011. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(10)62353-7.

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