

The NSDUH Report

April 8, 2005

Injection Drug Use Update: 2002 and 2003

In Brief

- In 2002 and 2003, 354,000 (0.2 percent) persons aged 12 or older had used a needle to inject heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines, or other stimulants during the past year
- In 2002 and 2003, males were twice as likely as females to report past year injection drug use
- The last time they used a needle to inject drugs, 13.1 percent of past year injection drug users knew or suspected that someone else had used the needle before them, and 18.1 percent used a needle that someone else used after them

Research shows a strong link between injection drug use and the transmission of blood-borne infections, such as HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and the herpes simplex virus 2, particularly when needles are reused or shared.^{1,2,3} The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks respondents aged 12 or older to report whether they have ever used a needle to inject a drug that was not prescribed for them or that they took only for the feeling or experience it caused. Respondents are asked whether they had injected heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines, or other stimulants during the past year.

NSDUH also asks about the last time that respondents used a needle to inject any of these drugs, including how they had obtained the needle and whether they had reused a needle that *they* used before, whether they used a needle that they knew or suspected *someone else* had used before, whether someone else used the needle after them, and whether they used bleach to

Figure 1. Percentages of Persons Aged 12 or Older Who Reported Past Year Injection Drug Use,* by Age Group: 2002 and 2003

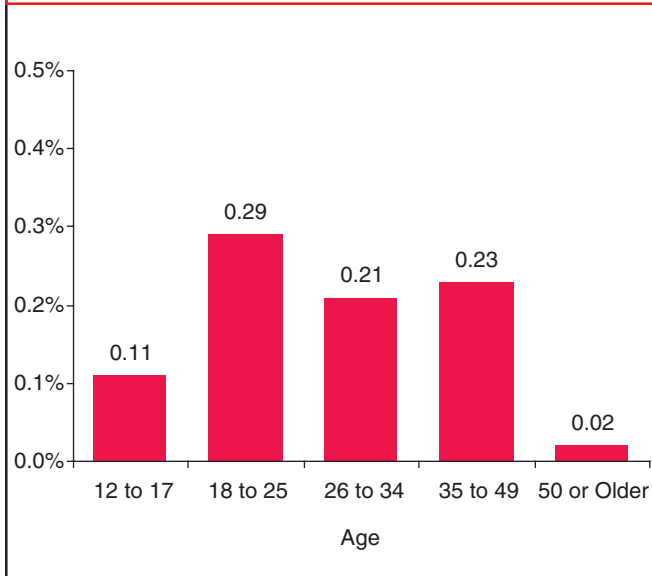


Table 1. Estimated Numbers and Percentages of Past Year Injection Drug Users Aged 12 or Older Who Reported How They Got Their Needle the Last Time They Used One to Inject Drugs: 2002 and 2003**

How Needle Was Obtained***	Estimated Number	Percent
Bought from a pharmacy	140,000	39.5
Given by, stolen from a person	73,000	20.5
Needle exchange	59,000	16.7
Given by, stolen from a location	24,000	6.8
Other	56,000	15.7
Don't know/refused/no answer	3,000	0.8

clean the needle before they used it.⁴ All findings presented in this report are annual averages based on combined data from the 2002 and 2003 NSDUH.

Prevalence of Needle Use⁵

In 2002 and 2003, an annual average of 354,000 (0.2 percent) persons aged 12 or older had used a needle to inject heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines, or other stimulants during the past year. An estimated 168,000 persons injected heroin during the past year; 168,000 persons injected cocaine; 119,000 injected methamphetamines; and 78,000 injected other stimulants.

Combined data from the 2002 and 2003 NSDUH indicated that young adults aged 18

to 25 (0.3 percent) were the most likely to have injected drugs during the past year and they were significantly more likely to do so than youths aged 12 to 17 (0.1 percent) or persons aged 50 or older (0.02 percent) (Figure 1). Males (0.2 percent) were twice as likely as females (0.1 percent) to have injected drugs during the past year.

There were no differences in past year injection drug use by race/ethnicity. Past year injection drug use rates were similar among geographic regions and among metropolitan and non-metropolitan county types.

Needle Sources

Combined data from the 2002 and 2003 NSDUH indicated that 140,000 (39.5 percent) past year injection drug users bought a needle from a pharmacy the

last time they injected drugs, and 59,000 (16.7 percent) obtained a needle through a needle exchange program⁶ (Table 1).

Drug Injection Risk Behaviors

More than one half (51.4 percent) of past year injection drug users reused a needle that they had used before the last time they injected drugs (Figure 2). Approximately 13.1 percent used a needle that they knew or suspected someone else had used before them, and 18.1 percent used a needle that someone else used after them. An estimated 64.4 percent of past year injection drug users did not clean the needle with bleach before the last time they had used one to inject drugs.

Figure 2. Percentages of Past Year Injection Drug Users Aged 12 or Older Who Reported Engaging in Risk Behaviors the Last Time They Used a Needle to Inject Drugs: 2002 and 2003

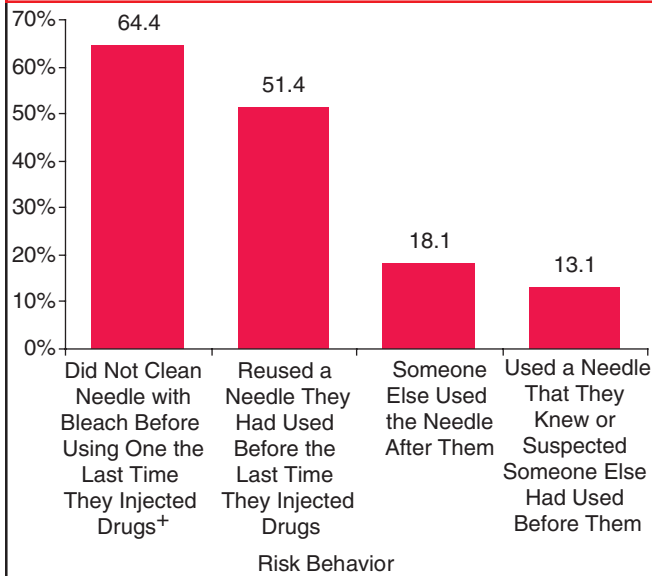


Figure and Table Notes

Source: SAMHSA, 2002 and 2003 NSDUH.

* Drugs included in past year injection drug use are heroin, cocaine, methamphetamines, or other stimulants.

** The sum of the estimates may not equal the total number of needle users due to rounding.

***The category "Given by, stolen from a person" included *friends, relatives, and other unspecified persons*; additional possible categories, though not reported among past year injection drug users, were *athletic trainer and someone in prison*. The category "Given by, stolen from a location" included *medical facilities/medical professional, other unspecified locations, and veterinarian facility/veterinarian*; additional possible categories, though not reported among past year injection drug users, include *work, pharmacy/store, farm supply store, and military supply store*. Though the category *medical facilities/medical professional* includes persons, this category was classified as *location* because *medical facility* took priority within the category. The category *veterinarian facility/veterinarian* was included in the *location* category for the same reason. The "Other" category included *other (unspecified), bought it on the street, from a drug dealer/came with drugs, and shooting gallery*. Additional possible categories, though not reported among past year injection drug users, were *found it in a waste-can, shared needles, and purchased online/via the Internet*.

+ Respondents were asked if they used bleach to clean the needle before they used it. The negative response is reported here.

End Notes

- Doherty, M. C., Garfein, R. S., Monterroso, E., Brown, D., & Vlahov, D. (2000). Correlates of HIV infection among young adult short-term injection drug users. *AIDS, 14*, 717-726.
- Sylvestre, D. L., Loftis, J. M., Hauser, P., Genser, S., Cesari, H., Borek, N., Kresina, T. F., Seeff, L., & Francis, H. (2004). Co-occurring hepatitis C, substance use, and psychiatric illness: Treatment issues and developing integrated models of care. *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, 81*, 719-734.
- Tien, P. C., Kovacs, A., Bacchetti, P., French, A. L., Augenbraun, M., Cole, S. R., Hessol, N., & Justman, J. (2004). Association between syphilis, antibodies to herpes simplex virus type 2, and recreational drug use and hepatitis B virus infection in the Women's Interagency HIV Study. *Clinical Infectious Diseases, 39*, 1363-1370.
- Response options for the question of how they obtained the needle were (1) bought the needle from a pharmacy, (2) got the needle from a needle exchange, (3) bought the needle on the street, (4) got the needle in a shooting gallery (i.e., a place where drugs are used), or (5) got the needle some other way. Respondents who indicated that they "got the needle some other way" were asked to describe how they got the needle.
- NSDUH estimates of drug use prevalence are designed to describe the civilian, noninstitutionalized household population aged 12 or older. Although this population includes almost 98 percent of the U.S. population aged 12 or older, some population subgroups are excluded that may have different drug-using patterns. For instance, persons living in institutional group quarters, such as prisons and residential drug treatment centers, as well as homeless persons, are not included in NSDUH and have been shown in other surveys to have higher rates of illicit drug use. For an in-depth discussion of this issue, see Wright, D., Gfroerer, J., & Epstein, J. (1997). Ratio estimation of hardcore drug use. *Journal of Official Statistics, 13*, 401-416.
- A needle exchange program is a facility where injection drug users can trade in used needles for clean needles.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Prior to 2002, this survey was called the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA). The 2002 data are based on information obtained from 68,126 persons aged 12 or older; the 2003 data are based on information obtained from 67,784 persons aged 12 or older. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

The NSDUH Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

Information and data for this issue are based on the following publications and statistics:

Office of Applied Studies. (2004). *Results from the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 04-3964, NSDUH Series H-25). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Office of Applied Studies. (2003). *Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 03-3836, NSDUH Series H-22). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Also available online: <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov>

Because of improvements and modifications to the 2002 NSDUH, estimates from the 2002 and 2003 surveys should not be compared with estimates from the 2001 or earlier versions of the survey to examine changes over time.

