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### INCIDENCE OF HEPATITIS C VIRUS AND HIV AMONG INJECTING DRUG USERS IN NORTHERN PAKISTAN: A PROSPECTIVE COHORT STUDY

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**INTRODUCTION:** The increasing scales of injecting drug use creates a potentially massive group of individuals at risk of acquiring blood borne pathogens such as HIV, HBV and HCV. The objective of this study was to Incidence of HCV and HIV among injecting drug users in Northern Pakistan.

**METHODS:** In 2002, we recruited from community settings, drug rehabilitation centers and prisons in Northern Pakistan mainly in Rawalpindi, Swat and Mardan, 500 injecting drug users who were aged below 30 years or had been injecting for six years or fewer. All had injected in the previous four weeks and could provide addresses for follow up. They completed interviewer administered questionnaires and provided oral fluid specimens and optionally dried capillary blood spots for testing for antibodies to HCV and HIV using published methods. They were followed up 12 months later. We calculated incidence using standard person time methods.

**RESULTS:** Most of the participants (41%) were recruited in Rawalpindi. The mean (SD) age was 25.4 (5.3) years, and 35% of the participants were women. Three fifths (65%) of the sample at baseline had been injecting for less than four years, and the median frequency of injecting was 2.0 times a day. Most (71%) of the participants mainly injected heroin. Participants reported high levels of injecting risk behaviour, with 54% at baseline reporting injecting in the previous four weeks with needles and syringes used by someone else. The baseline prevalence of antibody to HCV was 42% and of antibody to HIV was 3.4%. The overall follow up rate was 80%. The incidence of antibody to HCV was 22.0 cases per 100 person years and of antibody to HIV was 1.7 cases per 100 person years.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The incidence of HCV in Northern Pakistan is high and of HIV higher than reported in the epidemiological spread sheet of Pakistan (0.7%).

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10.2 134 10.2 HIV incidence measurement

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