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The Difference is Research

## Background

- Skin and soft tissue infections are common in people who inject drugs
- Can be **life-threatening** if untreated. Potential complications:
  - Endocarditis
  - Sepsis
  - Amputations
- Negatively affect **quality of life**:
  - Painful
  - Odour
  - Stigma and discrimination when accessing care
- Cleaning injecting sites with alcohol swabs may reduce skin and soft tissue infections
- Are there opportunities to increase swab use?

## Aims

- Determine proportion of people who inject drugs who routinely swab injecting sites prior to injecting
- Identify correlates of non-swabbing
- Explore reasons for non-swabbing

## Methods

- Cross-sectional survey of sentinel populations of people who inject drugs living in Australian capital cities
- Structured interview on drug use and related outcomes
- Logistic regression to identify correlates of non-swabbing

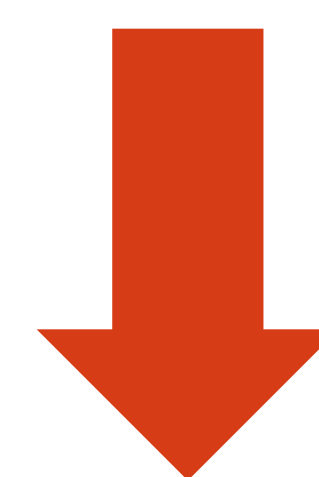
## Results

Of 853 people who inject drugs (67% male and median age 42 years):

28% **never** or **almost never** swabbed prior to injecting & 26% did not swab prior to **last** injection



Older participants were more likely to swab



Less likely to swab:

- Injecting crystal methamphetamine
- Sharing needle/syringes
- Reusing own needle/syringes

Among people who did not swab at last injection (n=222):

Few specific reasons identified for not using swabs

**Simply not seen as an important part of the injecting routine**

A small number of participants reported swab use was painful or harmful

## Discussion

- Regular swabbing of injecting sites was reported by the majority of people who inject drugs
- But opportunities do exist to increase swab use and reduce skin and soft-tissue infections:
  - May usefully target younger people who inject drugs, and those who inject crystal methamphetamine
- NSP workers ideally placed to promote good injecting hygiene:
  - Focusing on injecting hygiene encourages an **holistic approach** to the health of people who inject drugs
  - Supporting injecting hygiene likely to have highly salient impacts on clients’ vein and skin health – good outcome for clients and workers!
- Need to better understand why swabbing may be viewed as harmful



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