Trends in amphetamine injection and determinants of initiation among people who inject drugs in Montréal, Canada: 2011-2019

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  Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)

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- SH receives salary from a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) grant.
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- DV has no interests to declare.
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Background

Stimulant use in Montréal, Canada

- Stimulant injection contributes substantially to HIV and HCV incidence among people who inject drugs (PWID) (1)
- In Montréal, cocaine injection is highly prevalent among PWID whereas amphetamine injection is uncommon (2-5)

⊗ *Cocaine injection: 40-60%*
Amphetamine injection: 3-7%

- Yet cocaine injection has declined significantly since the early 2000s as local drug markets and trends evolve (5,6)
- Across the country, amphetamine use and related harms appears to be rising (7,8)

Stimulant use in Canada

6-fold increase

In methamphetamine possession incidents nationwide (2011 to 2017) [7]

2-fold increase

In hospitalizations related to stimulants other than cocaine (2007 to 2014) [8]

2-fold increase

In health care costs related to stimulants other than cocaine (2007 to 2014) [8]

All of Canada

Stimulant use in Canada

6-fold increase

In methamphetamine possession incidents nationwide (2011 to 2017) [7]

2-fold increase

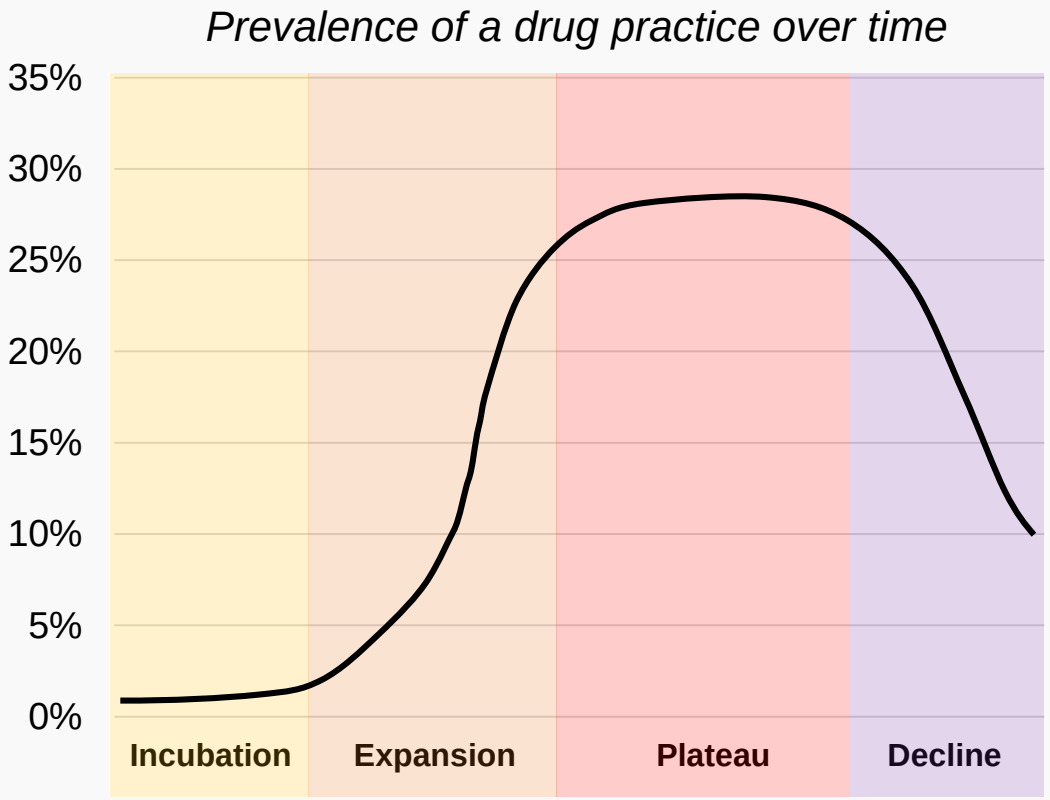
In hospital visits related to stimulants other than cocaine (2011 to 2017) [8]

3-fold increase

In proportion of PWID injecting stimulants other than cocaine (2004 to 2016) [8]

Province of Québec

Evolution of drug eras



Subcultural evolution and illicit drug use*

ANDREW GOLUB, **BRUCE D. JOHNSON**, and **ELOISE DUNLAP**
Institute for Special Populations Research, National Development and Research Institutes, Inc

Addict Res Theory. 2005 May ; 13(3): 217–229. doi:10.1080/16066350500053497.

Popularity of practices tends to follow a natural and predictable pattern

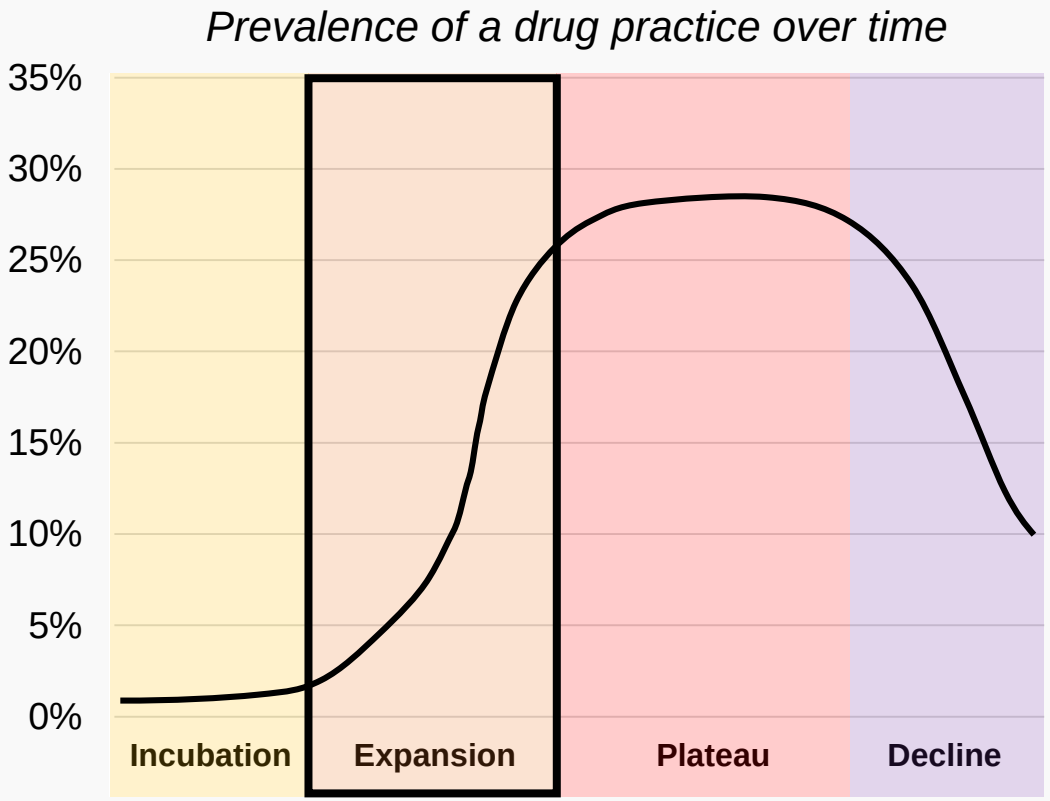
Practice starts within a limited subpopulation and specific subcultural context.

Practice introduced to wider subgroups and broader population. People exert agency in adopting the practice; susceptibility varies.

Most people 'at risk' have adopted the new practice or had the opportunity to do so.

Practice loses favour, particularly among youth/ new initiates, leading to gradual decline in use.

Evolution of drug eras



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Most people 'at risk' have adopted the new practice or had the opportunity to do so.

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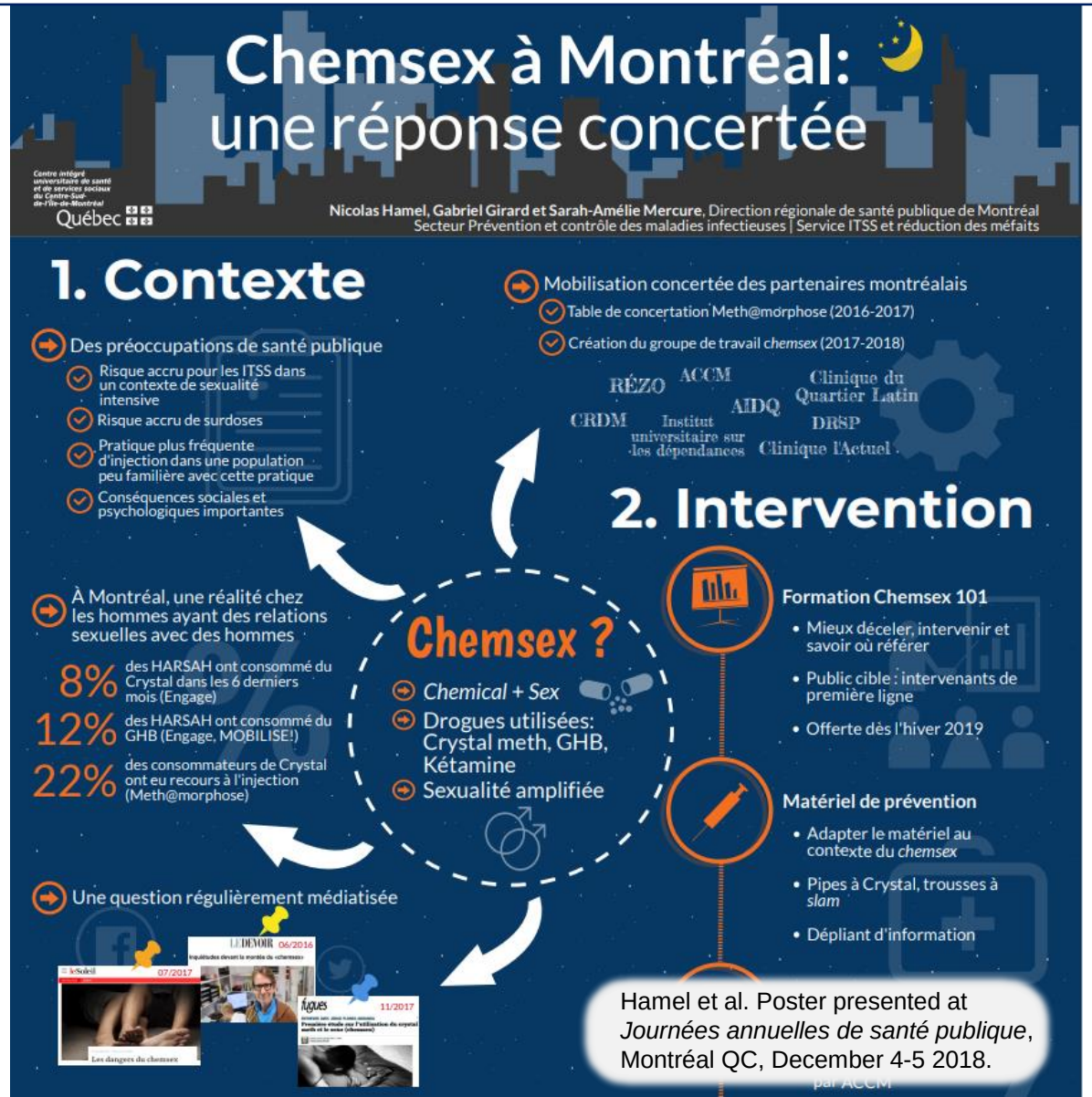
Amphetamine use among men who have sex with men (MSM)



Chemsex: Use of specific drugs (e.g. crystal meth) to facilitate, enhance, prolong sexual encounters [9, 10]

Among MSM in Montréal… [11]

7.9% used crystal meth

6.3% used crystal meth in the context of sexual activity

5.6% injected drugs

…in the past 6 months

Objectives

① To examine **annual trends** in the prevalence of amphetamine injection among PWID in Montréal, Canada, from 2011 to 2019

② To estimate the **incidence** of amphetamine injection and assess **sexual identity** as a risk factor for initiation among male and females

Methods

Data source

COHORTE
H·E·P·C·O
Recherche · Personnes utilisant des substances · Santé

03/2011 to 12/2019

Design: Prospective longitudinal open cohort study

Primary aim: To identify individual & contextual determinants of HCV infection among PWID

Setting: Montréal, QC, Canada

Eligibility: Drug injection in past 6 months, age ≥18 years

Recruitment: Combination of street-level strategies and community program referrals

Follow-up: Scheduled every 3 months (HCV RNA-) or yearly (HCV RNA+)

Procedures: Interviewer-administered questionnaires, HCV testing

Primary measures

OUTCOME

Any amphetamine injection in the past three months (yes vs. no)

Self-reported at each visit. Prompts included 'speed', 'crystal', 'meth', 'ice', and Ritalin.

STRATIFICATION VARIABLE

Self-identified gender (male vs. female)

Recorded at enrolment

PREDICTOR VARIABLE

Self-identified sexual orientation (gay/bisexual vs. heterosexual)

Recorded at enrolment

Covariates

- Age (years)
- Ethnicity (white vs. non-white)
- Ever injected amphetamine

Recorded at enrolment, not updated

- Opioid agonist therapy
- Unstable housing
- Incarceration
- Public injecting
- Sex work
- Average monthly income ($)

Any injection of:

- Cocaine
- Heroin
- Other opioids

Any non-injection use of:

- Amphetamine
- Crack cocaine
- Alcohol
- Cannabis

- Frequent injection (≥30 past month)

Unless otherwise indicated, all variables:

- *Coded yes vs. no*
- *Updated at each visit*
- *Refer to the 3 months preceding the visit*

Analysis: Objective 1

Objective 1: Examine annual trends in the prevalence of amphetamine injection among PWID (2011 to 2019)

Sample

All participants with a cohort visit during the study period

Data selected

First questionnaire completed by participant in each calendar year

Stratification

By self-identified gender

Statistical analysis

- Estimated and plotted prevalence of past 3-month amphetamine injection by calendar year
- Linear trends assessed for statistical significance using Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE)
  - *Continuous term for calendar year*
  - *Adjusted for age at enrolment*
  - *2-sided p-values, $\alpha=0.05$*

Analysis: Objective 2

Objective 2: Estimate incidence of amphetamine injection and assess sexual identity as a risk factor for initiation

Sample

- No amphetamine injection in 6 months prior to enrolment
- Completed ≥1 follow-up visit.

Data selected

All questionnaires completed by included participants

Stratification

By self-identified gender

Statistical analysis

- Incidence of amphetamine injection computed using person-time method
- Cox regression to estimate hazard ratios (and 95% CIs) reflecting the relationship of sexual identity to initiation risk
  - *Multivariable model adjusted for age, lifetime amphetamine injection, and covariates significant ($p<0.10$) in bivariate models*
  - *Covariates modelled as time-dependent*

    Except sexual identity, age, ethnicity, lifetime amphetamine injection

Results

Participant characteristics at enrolment

	OBJECTIVE 1	
% or Median (IQR)	Males (n=662)	Females (n=145)
Age (years)	**42.1 (33.0 – 48.9)**	**35.3 (27.3 – 43.0)**
Non-white ethnicity	8.9	13.2
Gay or bisexual identity	**9.1**	**31.7**
Ever injected amphetamine	20.8	17.1
≥30 injections in past month	42.6	47.6
Cocaine injecting	**63.3**	**49.0**
Amphetamine injecting	10.1	14.5
Heroin injecting	**30.9**	**47.9**
Prescription opioid injecting	38.7	44.8
Amphetamine use (non-injected)	26.4	29.0
Crack cocaine use (non-injected)	56.5	49.0
Alcohol use	68.9	70.0
Cannabis use	**69.5**	**56.6**
Opioid agonist treatment	**30.4**	**46.9**
Unstable housing	**42.2**	**24.1**
Incarceration	**13.9**	**6.2**
Public injecting	47.0	42.8
Sex work	**2.7**	**20.7**
Average monthly income ($CAD)	985 (740 – 1800)	1000 (736 – 1650)

past three months

n=807 (Objective 1)

Bold figures indicate statistically significant differences ($p<0.05$) between males and females.

Participant characteristics at enrolment

	OBJECTIVE 1	
% or Median (IQR)	Males (n=662)	Females (n=145)
Age (years)	**42.1 (33.0 – 48.9)**	**35.3 (27.3 – 43.0)**
Non-white ethnicity	8.9	13.2
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Sex work	**2.7**	**20.7**
Average monthly income ($CAD)	985 (740 – 1800)	1000 (736 – 1650)

past three months

n=807 (Objective 1)

133 had no follow-up visits

73 had injected amphetamine at baseline

n=601 (Objective 2)

Loss-to-follow-up associated with…

Age (-)
Unstable housing (+)
Heroin injecting (+)

Gay/bisexual identity (+)
Income (+)
Incarceration (+)
Crack cocaine use (-)

Participant characteristics at baseline

	OBJECTIVE 1		OBJECTIVE 2	
% or Median (IQR)	Males (n=662)	Females (n=145)	Males (n=501)	Females (n=100)
Age (years)	**42.1 (33.0 – 48.9)**	**35.3 (27.3 – 43.0)**	**42.8 (34 – 50)**	**36.2 (39 – 44)**
Non-white ethnicity	8.9	13.2	9.18	12.1
Gay or bisexual identity	**9.1**	**31.7**	**8.58**	**24.0**
Ever injected amphetamine	20.8	17.1	**12.0**	**3.00**
≥30 injections in past month	42.6	47.6		
Cocaine injecting	**63.3**	**49.0**		
Amphetamine injecting	10.1	14.5		
Heroin injecting	**30.9**	**47.9**		
Prescription opioid injecting	38.7	44.8		
Amphetamine use (non-injected)	26.4	29.0		
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Unstable housing	**42.2**	**24.1**		
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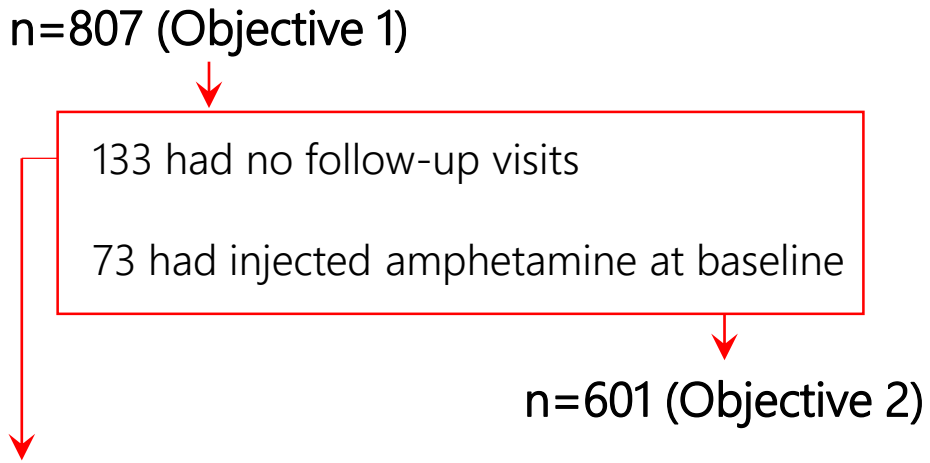
Public injecting	47.0	42.8		
Sex work	**2.7**	**20.7**		
Average monthly income ($CAD)	985 (740 – 1800)	1000 (736 – 1650)		

past three months

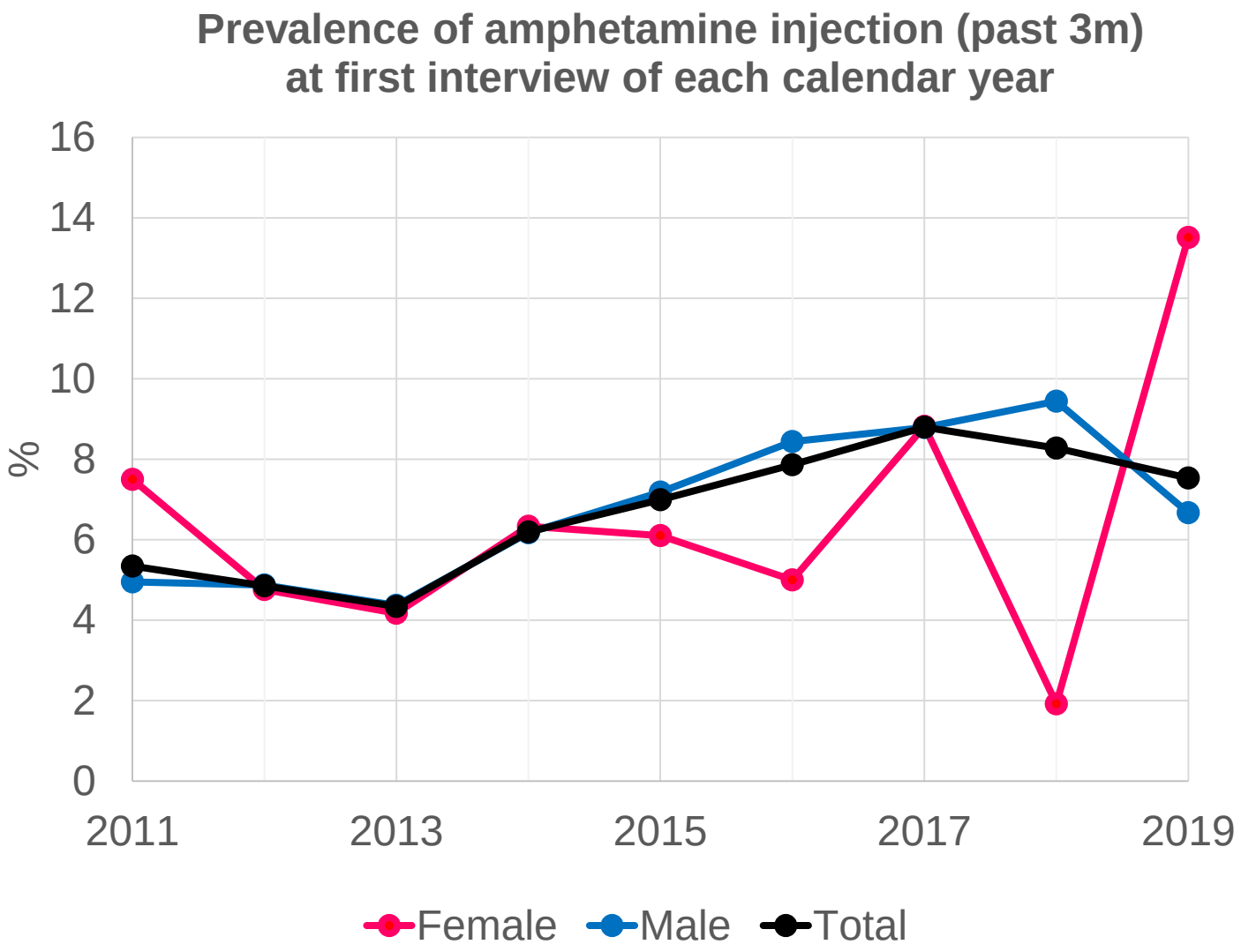


Loss-to-follow-up associated with…

Age (-)
Unstable housing (+)
Heroin injecting (+)

Gay/bisexual identity (+)
Income (+)
Incarceration (+)
Crack cocaine use (-)

Prevalence of amphetamine injection (2011-2019)



n=3587 observations from 807 participants

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
n	262	371	438	452	472	471	432	338	292

	2011 estimate (%)	2019 estimate (%)	Mean linear trend	*p**
Total	5.41	7.53	**+ 0.48**	**0.022**
Male	5.02	6.67	**+ 0.51**	**0.027**
Female	7.50	13.5	+ 0.39	0.510

** p-value from GEE term for calendar year (adjusted for age)*

Crude incidence of amphetamine injection

	Number of participants	Number initiating	Person-years (p-y) follow-up	Incidence rate per 100 p-y	95% CI
Total	601	95	2585.73	**3.67**	**2.99 – 4.47**
Male	501	83	2186.23	**3.80**	**3.04 – 4.68**
Female	100	12	399.50	**3.00**	**1.63 – 5.11**

Relative hazards of initiation by sexual identity

	MALES (n=501)		FEMALES (n=100)	
	Crude Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p	Crude Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p
Gay or bisexual identity	**2.17 (1.18 – 4.01)**	**.013**	**2.20 (1.17 – 4.14)**	**.015**

Relative hazards of initiation by sexual identity

	MALES (n=501)		FEMALES (n=100)	
	Crude Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p	Crude Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p
Gay or bisexual identity	**2.17 (1.18 – 4.01)**	**.013**	**2.20 (1.17 – 4.14)**	**.015**
	Adjusted Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p	Adjusted Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p
Gay or bisexual identity	**2.20 (1.17 – 4.14)**	**.015**	2.33 (0.55 – 9.85)	.249

Relative hazards of initiation by sexual identity

	MALES (n=501)		FEMALES (n=100)	
	Crude Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p	Crude Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p
Gay or bisexual identity	**2.17 (1.18 – 4.01)**	**.013**	**2.20 (1.17 – 4.14)**	**.015**
	Adjusted Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p	Adjusted Hazard Ratio (95% CI)	p
Gay or bisexual identity	**2.20 (1.17 – 4.14)**	**.015**	2.33 (0.55 – 9.85)	.249
Age (years)	**0.97 (0.94 – 0.99)**	**.005**	0.98 (0.90 – 1.06)	.585
Lifetime amphetamine injection	1.33 (0.73 – 2.43)	.357	4.37 (0.45 – 42.6)	.205
Year of interview	**1.16 (1.01 – 1.33)**	**.030**		
≥30 injections in past month	1.03 (0.62 – 1.72)	.912		
Cocaine injecting			2.40 (0.52 – 11.0)	.262
Heroin injecting	1.27 (0.75 – 2.15)	.372		
Prescription opioid injecting	1.44 (0.86 – 2.40)	.167	1.11 (0.27 – 4.65)	.887
Amphetamine use (non-injected)	**2.81 (1.73 – 4.56)**	**<.001**	1.88 (0.48 – 7.29)	.362
Crack cocaine use (non-injected)			3.36 (0.71 – 15.9)	.126
Alcohol use	0.65 (0.41 – 1.03)	.064		
Opioid agonist treatment	**1.81 (1.13 – 2.89)**	**.014**		
Unstable housing	**1.62 (1.01 – 2.61)**	**.046**		
Public injecting	**1.88 (1.08 – 3.27)**	**.025**	2.89 (0.72 – 11.5)	.133

Discussion

Conclusions

- Amphetamine injection has been expanding in Montreal at a rate of 0.5% per year
- Similar trends were observed among PWID identifying as male and female, suggesting expansion is not limited to either gender
- PWID identifying as gay or bisexual appeared to be at increased risk of initiating amphetamine injection regardless of their gender identity
- Other variables associated with initiation were less consistent across genders; for example, cocaine injection and crack cocaine use appeared to be potential risk factors among females but not males
- Risk of initiation increased with each calendar year, suggesting the drug era could expand at an increasing rate in the coming years.

Implications & future directions

- We should anticipate further increases in amphetamine injection among PWID
- Public health action should seek to stabilise this trend by preventing initiation among susceptible persons
- Qualitative and ethnographic research is needed to better understand the contexts in which initiation occurs and the intersections between gender, sexual identity and sexual behaviour in determining susceptibility
- This work can also serve to identify harm reduction needs related to locally evolving subcultures around amphetamine injection (e.g. ‘slam kits’).

Limitations

- Findings may not be generalizable to all PWID in Montreal or to other settings
- Loss-to-follow up introduces a risk of selection bias in longitudinal analyses
- Outcome did not reflect true « initiation » in some cases (12% of males and 3% of females reported prior lifetime amphetamine injection). Analyses adjusted for this.
- We did not assess the relative contribution of sexual identity versus sexual behaviour; not all MSM identify as gay or bisexual.
- Conclusions for females are limited by a small sample size; we are addressing this with expanded recruitment strategies in the cohort. Experiences of transgendered individuals were not assessed.


Thank you for your attention
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COHORTE

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Recherche · Personnes utilisant des substances · Santé

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Supplementary slides

Sample descriptions (supplementary)

	OBJECTIVE 1			OBJECTIVE 2	
% or Median (IQR)	Males (n=662)	Females (n=145)		Males (n=501)	Females (n=100)
Gay or bisexual identity	**9.1**	**31.7**		**8.58**	**24.0**
Ever injected amphetamine	**20.8**	**17.1**		**12.0**	**3.00**
Age (years)	**42.1 (33.0 – 48.9)**	**35.3 (27.3 – 43.0)**		**42.8 (34 – 50)**	**36.2 (39 – 44)**
Non-white ethnicity	8.9	13.2		9.18	12.1
≥30 injections in past month	42.6	47.6		38.5	41.0
Cocaine injecting	**63.3**	**49.0**		**62.9**	**44.0**
Amphetamine injecting	**10.1**	**14.5**		**0**	**0**
Heroin injecting	**30.9**	**47.9**		**28.1**	**45.0**
Prescription opioid injecting	38.7	44.8		33.9	41.0
Amphetamine use (non-injected)	26.4	29.0		21.8	24.0
Crack cocaine use (non-injected)	56.5	49.0		55.1	54.0
Alcohol use	68.9	70.0		69.1	69.0
Cannabis use	**69.5**	**56.6**		**68.5**	**50.0**
Opioid agonist treatment	**30.4**	**46.9**		29.5	53.0
Unstable housing	**42.2**	**24.1**		**39.1**	**23.0**
Incarceration	**13.9**	**6.2**		**13.6**	**5.00**
Public injecting	47.0	42.8		43.3	36.0
Sex work	**2.7**	**20.7**		**2.20**	**22.0**
Average monthly income ($CAD)	985 (740 – 1800)	1000 (736 – 1650)		950 (735 – 1800)	1070 (800 – 1800)

Relative hazards of initiation (supplementary)

	MALES (n=501)			
% or Median (IQR)	Crude HR (95% CI)	p	Adjusted HR (95% CI)	p
Gay or bisexual identity	**2.17 (1.18 – 4.01)**	**.013**	**2.20 (1.17 – 4.14)**	**.015**
Age (years)	**0.94 (0.92 – 0.96)**	**<.001**	**0.97 (0.94 – 0.99)**	**.005**
Lifetime amphetamine injection	1.58 (0.89 – 2.80)	.121	1.33 (0.73 – 2.43)	.357
Non-white ethnicity	0.95 (0.41 – 2.17)	.897		
Year of interview	**1.15 (1.01–1.31)**	**.030**	**1.16 (1.01 – 1.33)**	**.030**
≥30 injections in past month	**1.79 (1.15 – 2.77)**	**.001**	1.03 (0.62 – 1.72)	.912
Cocaine injecting	1.32 (0.85 – 2.05)	.217		
Heroin injecting	**2.34 (1.49 – 3.68)**	**<.001**	1.27 (0.75 – 2.15)	.372
Prescription opioid injecting	**2.88 (1.87 – 4.45)**	**<.001**	1.44 (0.86 – 2.40)	.167
Amphetamine use (non-injected)	**2.70 (1.69–4.30)**	**<.001**	**2.81 (1.73 – 4.56)**	**<.001**
Crack cocaine use (non-injected)	1.31 (0.85 – 2.01)	.225		
Alcohol use	**0.63 (0.41 – 0.97)**	**.037**	0.65 (0.41 – 1.03)	.064
Cannabis use	1.11 (0.71 – 1.72)	.199		
Opioid agonist treatment	**2.05 (1.33 – 3.16)**	**.001**	**1.81 (1.13 – 2.89)**	**.014**
Unstable housing	**1.65 (1.07 – 2.55)**	**.024**	**1.62 (1.01 – 2.61)**	**.046**
Incarceration	1.30 (0.69 – 2.44)	.426		
Public injecting	**3.34 (2.15 – 5.20)**	**<.001**	**1.88 (1.08 – 3.27)**	**.025**
Sex work	1.95 (0.48 – 7.98)	.353		
Average monthly income ($CAD)	0.95 (0.78 – 1.16)	.618		

Relative hazards of initiation (supplementary)

	FEMALES (n=100)			
% or Median (IQR)	Crude HR (95% CI)	p	Adjusted HR (95% CI)	p
Gay or bisexual identity	**3.86 (1.24 – 12.0)**	**.020**	2.33 (0.55 – 9.85)	.249
Age (years)	0.97 (0.91 – 1.03)	.304	0.98 (0.90 – 1.06)	.585
Lifetime amphetamine injection	**7.12 (1.54 – 33.0)**	**.012**	4.37 (0.45 – 42.6)	.205
Non-white ethnicity	1.20 (0.26 – 5.49)	.816		
Year of interview	1.30 (0.91–1.84)	.149		
≥30 injections in past month	1.50 (0.48 – 4.67)	.481		
Cocaine injecting	**5.66 (1.52 – 21.1)**	**.010**	2.40 (0.52 – 11.0)	.262
Heroin injecting	1.42 (0.91 – 1.84)	.149		
Prescription opioid injecting	3.08 (0.97 – 9.81)	.057	1.11 (0.27 – 4.65)	.887
Amphetamine use (non-injected)	**3.37 (0.999 – 11.3)**	**.050**	1.88 (0.48 – 7.29)	.362
Crack cocaine use (non-injected)	**4.53 (1.21 – 17.0)**	**.025**	3.36 (0.71 – 15.9)	.126
Alcohol use	0.93 (0.30 – 2.95)	.904		
Cannabis use	1.57 (0.50 – 4.88)	.440		
Opioid agonist treatment	1.06 (0.34 – 3.35)	.921		
Unstable housing	2.26 (0.67 – 7.59)	.186		
Incarceration	1.56 (0.08 – 32.2)	.775		
Public injecting	**4.30 (1.35 – 13.7)**	**.014**	2.89 (0.72 – 11.5)	.133
Sex work	2.56 (0.81 – 8.10)	.110		
Average monthly income ($CAD)	1.05 (0.77 – 1.42)	.759		