

Cervical screening uptake among people in Australia who inject drugs

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Introduction / Issues: Regular screening is essential for early detection and management of cervical cancer. In Australia, up-to-date (i.e., past five year) cervical screening coverage is among the highest globally (~70%). However, little is known about uptake among people who inject drugs, and it is possible that known barriers to preventive care among this population extend to cervical screening.

Method / Approach: In June-July 2023, 234 people who inject drugs and are eligible for the Australian National Cervical Screening Program (people with a cervix aged 25-74 years) participated in Illicit Drug Reporting System interviews. Participants responded to questions regarding uptake, barriers, and knowledge of cervical screening. We used logistic regression to assess sociodemographic and drug use factors associated with up-to-date screening.

Key Findings OR Results: Most participants (92.7%) reported lifetime screening uptake, while three-quarters (73.7%) reported up-to-date screening. Among those who had never been screened/not had an up-to-date screen, the most frequently cited barriers were "I am not currently sexually active" (17.1%), "the test is painful/uncomfortable" (17.1%), and "I don't have time" (10.0%). One-third (34.2%) of participants were aware of the availability of cervical sample self-collection. No factors were significantly associated with up-to-date screening, possibly due to insufficient statistical power.

Discussions and Conclusions: Up-to-date cervical screening coverage among this sample was similar to that of the eligible Australian population. Awareness that self-collection is now an option for cervical screening was low.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The small yet important group who had not recently been screened may benefit from education campaigns about the availability of sample self-collection to mitigate pain/discomfort associated with screening and the recommendation for a five-yearly screen regardless of current sexual activity.

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