

O F F C U T 1

Research on injectors in London indicates that hepatitis C is spreading more rapidly than was thought and that HIV is also on the increase. In 2001 researchers interviewed 428 injectors aged below 30 or who had been injecting for no more than six years and tested them for hepatitis C and HIV. ❶ Over 90% were in London. A year later 70% were retested. At the first point about 44% were infected with hepatitis C and 4% with HIV. Over the following year those previously negative had about a 4 in 10 chance of becoming infected with hepatitis C and for HIV a 3–4 in 100 chance. These rates of fresh infection in new and younger injectors suggest that “drug policy is failing to maintain historical levels of protection from bloodborne viruses among this high risk group.” Across England and Wales the proportion of new (up to three years) injectors already positive for hepatitis C has increased from 8–9% in the last years of the ‘90s to 14–17% in 2001–2003 and in 2003 nearly 1% were positive for HIV, the highest figure since 1990. ❷

❶ Judd A. et al. *Incidence of hepatitis C virus and HIV among new injecting drug users in London: prospective cohort study*. British Medical Journal: 2005, 330, p. 24–25. Download from www.bmj.com.

❷ *Shooting up. Infections among injecting drug users in the United Kingdom 2003*. Health Protection Agency, 2004. Download from www.hpa.org.uk.