

3. Steps 1 and 2 are repeated.
4. The syringe is flushed twice with water.

The process takes about a minute and a half, and must be repeated before every use. If after use the syringe is not going to be used again right away, it should immediately be flushed through with cold water or filled with water to prevent residual blood coagulating.

Domestic bleach kills HIV and hepatitis viruses in dilutions as low as one part in a 100. Bleach at this strength totally inactivates HIV within one minute even when the virus is present in concentrations 10,000 to 100,000 times greater than those found in human blood.¹¹ Using *full strength* bleach means the 20-30 seconds the bleach is in contact with the inside of the syringe is ample time to kill any HIV present, and the delay of two to three minutes is acceptable to most sharing injectors. Injectors find it difficult to wait longer than this. There is increasing evidence that the act of purchasing the drug to be injected increases the withdrawal syndrome.¹²

Used in this way, bleach harms neither the user nor the syringe. There have been reports of undiluted bleach being accidentally injected,^{13,14} resulting only in pain and oedema which resolved within one and two weeks respectively. Even when 30cc was inadvertently infused, the patient recovered.¹⁵ Neither does bleach damage the syringe. Immersion of an insulin syringe in full strength bleach for 48 hours caused no damage.¹⁶

Effective hygiene

Injecting drug users should not share works, but if they have to, two alternatives are available: boiling, and bleach. Boiling may have some practical drawbacks, but bleach conforms to many of the ideal requirements for use by injecting drug users. It is fast, easily available, inexpensive, of low toxicity and effective against a very wide range of bacteria and viruses. Anxieties about accidental injection of the small amounts that may remain after cleansing are unfounded. Problems raised about the difficulty of explaining how to dilute the bleach, or that diluted bleach is less effective over time, are irrelevant when the bleach is used *undiluted*.

The theoretical danger that bleach might only serve to harden coagulated blood in the syringe, making the equipment more difficult to clean, is not borne out in practice.

In San Francisco, the MidCity Consortium has been using undiluted bleach since 1986. Although over 90 per cent of drug injectors there regularly share needles, studies have shown that since the bleach programme was introduced, HIV seroprevalence levels among heterosexual white injecting drug users have stabilised at around 10 per cent. This reduction was associated with an increase in the regular use of bleach from 3 per cent before intervention to 68 per cent in spring 1987.¹⁶ In two years only 3.8 per cent of a small cohort of 113 seronegative drug users became HIV seropositive.¹⁷ These figures contrast dramatically with the spread of infection in Edinburgh and Dundee. □

WRAPS AGAINST AIDS

How can you bring the anti-AIDS message before drug users each time they take drugs? Brighton's Drug Advice and Information Service found a novel solution.

Andrew Fraser

IDEALLY, A HEALTH education/harm-minimisation campaign aimed at drug users would include the following features:

- ▶ Its impact would be limited to the target group, meaning it could transmit information and use language inappropriate in a more general campaign.
- ▶ It would harness the close (and closed) networks of the drug using community as a positive strength in disseminating the message.
- ▶ Its messages would be positive rather than negative. For example, it is better to give information about local syringe availability rather than just tell injectors never to share.

On these grounds it is easy to be critical of government harm minimisation strategies propagated through mass multimedia campaigns, but it is more important to look constructively for local agency initiatives to complement (or compensate for) the government's efforts.

Brighton's Drug Advice and Information Service (DAIS) started with the development of existing links with the Sussex AIDS Helpline, which has considerable experience of working with the gay community but little contact with drug users. DAIS and the AIDS Helpline combined forces by pooling knowledge, sharing training, and planning joint campaigns. An outcome from this cooperation and a vital part of our strategy is that the helpline has regular sessional input into DAIS.

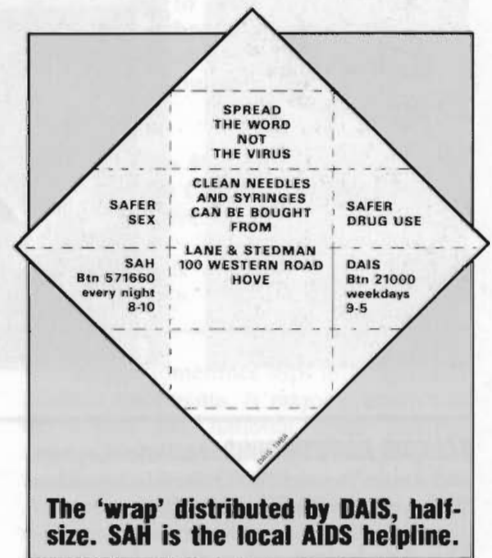
In our first year we had introduced small emergency helpline cards. Staff noticed these were popular with clients, both for the intended purpose and as roaches for joints! As a result of this alternative application, knowledge of the agency spread rapidly through user networks.

The author is the director of the Drug Advice & Information Service (DAIS) at 38 West Street, Brighton BN1 2RE, phone 0273 21000.

Capitalising on this earlier experience, we decided to evaluate the feasibility of using a similar mechanism to target drug users with harm minimisation messages about HIV infection.

It was decided to produce pads of printed paper squares of the size used to make 'folds', 'bundles', 'bindles', 'wraps' or 'bags' for packaging heroin or amphetamine deals at retail level. These 9cm squares will hold a £10 deal of heroin or up to a gram of amphetamine sulphate. They were produced in pads of 24 sheets, with printed text and dotted fold-lines.

The wrap pads are distributed to drug



users who visit DAIS and via them are circulating through dealer networks, spreading the harm minimisation message to users who are not DAIS clients — a low cost way of harnessing socialisation and dealing networks among drug users to harm/minimisation objectives.

IT WAS CONSIDERED important that the slogan on the wraps should be a positive one. It also promotes concepts of responsible action and self-help, and endorses the value of 'street grapevine' networks (see illustration). Also included is information on a local pharmacy which will sell syringes and needles to drug users and on access to local services, each of which can advise on safer drug use and safer sex. To avoid 'answerphone trauma', the hours stated are when the lines are staffed. □