

# Stats show hundreds of teens using needles Feds provide \$50,000 locally for Hep C education program

Halton Hills Community Support and Information (HHCSI) is the beneficiary of \$50,000 from Health Canada to be used for a Hepatitis C education program.

Halton MP Julian Reed made the announcement Monday.

"Injection drug use is associated with at least half of Hepatitis C virus infections," said Reed. "It can also be contracted through such means as tattooing and body piercing. Youth may be at risk of contracting Hepatitis C because of unsafe behaviours. They need information to help them make choices to prevent transmission of this virus which, over the long term, can lead to such serious illnesses as profound fatigue, cirrhosis and liver cancer."

According to the Halton Region Health Department it can be spread by:

- sharing needles, or any other equipment used for injecting drugs, even once
- body/ear piercing, tattooing, etc. with unsterilized equipment
- accidentally being stuck with a used needle
- having unprotected sex with a Hepatitis C positive partner (low risk)

HHCSI, as a lead agency for nine partners, will hire a person for a year to set up an education program among north Halton youths. This worker will look for high school youths to provide training who in turn can educate their peers.

"North Halton is absolutely underserved in terms of Hepatitis C education. There's been no concerted effort before to help youth understand just how dangerous it could be and to let them know they have to be terribly careful if they're going to do certain behaviors," said HHCSI executive director Joan Barham.



JOAN BARHAM

"The statistics show there is a need for this in the Halton Hills area."

According to the 1999 Halton Drug Use Survey, 1.7 per cent of youth surveyed admitted to using heroin in the past year, 4.8 per cent used speed, 2 per cent used cocaine. Barham said extrapolating those numbers to north Halton youth population numbers, it works out to 168 north Halton youth who may have used heroin, 499 used speed, 269 used cocaine. That's a total of 916 youths who may possibly be involved with needle drug injections.

As well, she said, there's about 128 youths that are at risk for homelessness, which is a risk factor for drug use.

HHCSI partners are: Halton Region Health Department, Hamilton AIDS Network, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, ADAPT, Ford/CAW 707 Employee Family Assistance, The Works, Toronto Public Health, Bridging the Gap, the HARM Reduction Production and Halton Regional Police Service drug and morality bureau. They'll provide additional training, expertise, office/workshop space, and funds.

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

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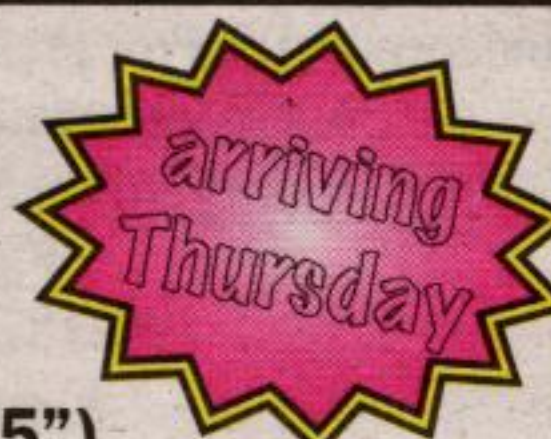


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