

Charities mark Irish AIDS Day with harm reduction campaign for people who inject Snow blow.

On Irish AIDS Day, 15th June 2016, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Críona Ní Dhálaigh, launched a campaign highlighting the increased risk of HIV infection amongst people who inject drugs, particularly Snow blow.

The Ana Liffey Drug Project and HIV Ireland are taking action to address increasing HIV diagnoses amongst people who use Snow blow by providing harm reduction and HIV prevention information for people who inject drugs. Resources created include an information leaflet, posters and a factsheet, which will be distributed widely as well as promoted on social media and via the drugs.ie website.

Speaking at today's launch in the Mansion House, The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Críona Ní Dhálaigh, highlighted Ireland's upward trend in HIV diagnoses:

"New HIV diagnoses in Ireland have increased to their highest level on record in 2015. Provisional data published by the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre shows that a total of 491 people were newly diagnosed with HIV in 2015 – a 30% increase over 2014 figures. Data also shows a significant increase in HIV diagnoses amongst people who inject drugs with a 67% increase in 2015¹, many of whom are people who are homeless in Dublin²".

The Lord Mayor praised the efforts of both partner organisations to address the specific needs of at risk groups:

"I want to commend the Ana Liffey Drug Project and HIV Ireland for working together, sharing their expertise, and providing much needed harm reduction information to people who are more vulnerable to HIV. This targeted initiative is very much in line with Ireland's Healthy Ireland framework for improved health and well-being to address the specific needs of at-risk groups to reduce health inequalities."

Niall Mulligan, Executive Director of the national charity HIV Ireland said:

"We are working in partnership with the Ana Liffey Drug Project to play our part in addressing the increasing HIV diagnoses amongst people who inject drugs; we must reverse this trend in new HIV diagnoses. The Government needs to invest in the prevention of HIV - including more access to free testing in a variety of settings and a sustained national HIV prevention and awareness campaign – and HIV prevention should be included as a priority action in the next National Drugs Strategy."

Tony Duffin, Director of the Ana Liffey Drug Project said:

"Depending on a person's drug habit, a person who injects heroin may inject about four times a day; however, people who inject Snow blow may inject every two hours. More injecting means more blood exposure and this means more risk. This makes someone more vulnerable to HIV; Hep C; death by overdose, abscesses, etc."

¹ HIV in Ireland 2015 Provisional Data, HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre, 31st May 2016.

² Injection of new psychoactive substance snow blow associated with recently acquired HIV infections among homeless people who inject drugs in Dublin, Ireland, 2015

PRESS RELEASE
HIV Ireland
15th June 2016

Duffin continued:

"This increase in HIV in Dublin amongst people who inject drugs and who have multiple and complex needs, further highlights the need for Supervised Injecting Facilities. It is essential that the draft legislation in relation to Supervised Injecting Facilities is debated, finalised and enacted as a matter of urgency – if we are to save lives and taxpayers money."

The upward trend in HIV diagnoses has continued in 2016 with provisional data showing 231 new HIV diagnoses up to week 22 of 2016, compared to 167 during the same period last year – a 38% increase.³ Ireland now has an average of 10 people per week being diagnosed with HIV. Official figures are likely to understate the scale of the crisis as the European Centre for Disease Prevention Control (ECDC)/WHO Regional Office for Europe estimate that 30% of people living with HIV are undiagnosed⁴. It is therefore likely the number of people living with HIV in Ireland is considerably higher than the number of diagnosed cases.

To download the campaign leaflet, posters and factsheet visit drugs.ie/snowblowHIV.
For information about HIV, testing, safer sex and support visit hivireland.ie.

Ends

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³ Statutory Notifications of HIV and STIs reported in Ireland via the Computerised Infectious Disease Reporting (CIDR) system for Week 22, 2016 (Provisional data), HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre, 8th June 2016.

⁴ HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2009. Stockholm: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control; 2010.

PRESS RELEASE
HIV Ireland
15th June 2016

Information for Editors:

Ana Liffey Drug Project: Ana Liffey Drug Project is a national addiction service working to reduce the harm caused by drug use in Ireland. Ana Liffey provided direct services to over 2,914 clients in 2014, many of whom are among the most marginalised from mainstream service provision. To find out more about the Ana Liffey's services visit www.aldp.ie.

Drugs.ie is an independent website funded by the HSE and managed by the Ana Liffey Drug Project. The drugs.ie site has in excess of 150,000 unique Irish visitors each year and over 750,000 international visitors annually.

HIV Ireland: HIV Ireland is a registered charity operating at local, national and European level. Our mission and vision is to contribute towards a significant reduction in the incidence and prevalence of HIV in Ireland and towards the realisation of an AIDS-free generation by advocating for individuals living with HIV, preventing new HIV infections and combating HIV-related stigma and discrimination. We consistently engage in lobbying and campaigning in the promotion of human rights and our approach broadly reflects a harm minimisation model which emphasises practical rather than idealised goals. Service provision includes support for people living with HIV, free HIV and STI community-based testing, free condoms service, education and training programmes, free resources service, and a range of HIV and sexual health related campaigns and projects. Visit www.hivireland.ie for more information.

HIV data in Ireland: HIV surveillance reports are available from the HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre website www.hpsc.ie.

- HIV and STI Weekly Reports: <http://www.hpsc.ie/A-Z/HIVSTIs/SexuallyTransmittedInfections/Publications/STIReports/STIWeeklyReports/>.
- HIV in Ireland 2015 Provisional Data: <http://www.hpsc.ie/A-Z/HIVSTIs/HIVandAIDS/SurveillanceReports/>.

HSE Report 2015: *Injection of new psychoactive substance snow blow associated with recently acquired HIV infections among homeless people who inject drugs in Dublin, Ireland, 2015* - <http://www.lenus.ie/hse/handle/10147/583464>.