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# Use of alcohol swabs to clean injecting sites among people who regularly inject drugs in Australia

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## The issue

People who inject drugs (PWID) are frequently affected by skin and soft tissue infections, which can cause significant morbidity, mortality and costly health implications [1-3]. Use of alcohol swabs to clean injecting sites prior to injection assists in reducing the incidence of skin and soft tissue infections [1, 4].

## What our work found

Using data from face-to-face interviews with PWID conducted annually in Australian capital cities as part of the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS; N=853), we found that in 2017:

- The substantial minority of participants reported infrequent use of alcohol swabs before injecting, with 28% (n=240) reporting 'never' or 'almost never' swabbed injecting sites prior to injection in the last six months, and 26% (n=218) reporting not having swabbed prior to their last injection.

	SA	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	ACT	NT	TAS
Swabbed at last injection %	65	76	79	71	74	74	86	66

- One-quarter of those who reported not having swabbed prior to their last injection reported that they did not have any particular reason for not swabbing.

Among participants who reported not using a swab at last injection:	n (%)
Reason for not using a swab:	
Don't bother using swabs	104 (50)
Didn't have one on me	36 (17)
Tried but wasn't able to get swabs from NSP	0
Tried but wasn't able to get swabs from pharmacy	0
Tried by but wasn't able to get swabs from dispensing machine	0
No one I was with had one	2 (1)
Don't like swabbing	16 (8)
No particular reason	53 (25)
Other	7 (3)

## Conclusion

A quarter of PWID surveyed reported infrequently or never cleaning injecting sites with an alcohol swab prior to injecting. This is not a deliberate omission, but rather is simply not seen as a priority.

## Implications

HIV, HCV, and overdose treatment and prevention are critical priorities for brief interventions made possible by interactions between PWID and needle and syringe program staff. Helping people improve their injecting hygiene is another essential component of safe injecting education. This is likely to have a significant impact on the health of injecting sites and day-to-day wellbeing of individuals, while also reducing likelihood of significant morbidity and mortality.

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