

Self-injection and needle sharing of therapeutic
drugs among migrant farmworkers in the eastern
stream [abstract]

**SELF-INJECTION AND NEEDLE SHARING OF THERAPEUTIC DRUGS
AMONG MIGRANT FARMWORKERS IN THE EASTERN STREAM**

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We interviewed a convenience sample of 411 eastern stream migrant farmworkers, a multi-ethnic heterogeneous group, largely Latino. Knowledge items were adapted from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) modified by adjusting the language level and removing technical terms. All interviews were conducted by trained bilingual interviewers.

The survey revealed that 36.8 percent reported having two or more sexual partners during the past year. Twenty-five percent of the respondents reported having multiple partners without the use of a condom. Anal intercourse was present at insignificant levels. Intercourse with prostitutes was reported by 73 (18 percent) respondents.

Use of injectable illegal drugs was relatively low in this study, (2.9 percent reported injecting drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and speed); but the data uncovered a major incidence of a previously undocumented self-injected drug risk pattern. Eighty-two of the respondents (20.3 percent) reported self-injecting antibiotics and vitamins. Fourteen (3.5 percent) reported having injected antibiotics and vitamins with a shared needle. The number of individuals who self-injected as a therapeutic behavior and shared needles was greater than those who used recreational drugs and shared needles. The number of therapeutic injectors that share needles was also greater than the number that engaged in anal intercourse.

The likelihood of contracting AIDS escalates as the number of risk factors increase. Though needle sharing is prevalent in the eastern stream migrant population, it is not perceived by the participants as a negative or dangerous behavior. Yet, self-injection of therapeutic agents becomes a greater risk when considered in concert with the other risk factors present in the population. Exposure to additional factors such as sexual promiscuity, frequenting prostitutes, homosexual behavior, and having vaginal or anal intercourse without a condom creates a serious web of causation. These interrelated factors increase the risk of spreading AIDS in the migrant farmworker population.