

these numbers will grow.

3. The breast milk of an HIV infected woman can transmit HIV.

## A word about injecting drug use

**AIDS prevention must include education about injecting drug use, as this is the most common form of blood to blood transmission of HIV (and of Hepatitis B and C). This includes performance-enhancing drugs, or any injected substance.**

The drug or substance itself (such as crushed tablets) has nothing directly to do with HIV transmission; it is the *blood left behind in the needle which carries the virus from one person to the other*.

People take drugs to change the way they feel, or because it looks like fun, or to run faster, or to have bigger muscles. Different drugs go in and out of fashion with young people, and in some cases, drug use involves injecting.

In Australia, one of the front line defences against the spread of HIV has been the needle exchange programs, and their associated education and referral systems. There is a very low rate of HIV infection spread via needle sharing among Australian injecting drug users. *To date, this has largely prevented the spread of HIV in Australia into the general population.*

However, *recreational drug users* (those who use drugs occasionally) or sportspeople, are often not aware of the dangers of needle sharing. The numbers of recreational drug users and injecting sportspeople appear to be much higher than addicted users. Some of our young people will try injecting a drug. If they are going to inject, they must know to use a new, clean needle and syringe. Many first-timers use the needle of the person who is introducing them to the drug. If they use someone else's needle, they could be in danger from HIV infection, or Hepatitis. Needle exchange programs are open to recreational users as well as habituated users. Needles are also available for sale at chemists.

If you have problems with the idea of needle exchange, consider the following. Do you think it is true that:

1. No Western country has been successful at stopping drug trafficking.
2. No matter how good the drug prevention and rehabilitation programs are, there will always be some people who are determined to inject themselves with drugs (shoot up).

As long as those statements are true, injecting drug use will be around, and some young people will try it. If kids are going to experiment, even once, with injecting a drug, they must be able to do so without getting HIV infection. That means using a sterile, new needle and syringe.

Drug use is one of those facts we would rather not talk about, but our young