



# Injectable Hormonal Contraception and HSV-2 among Sex Workers in Vancouver

## Background

Research suggests that the injectable hormonal contraception ‘depot medroxyprogesterone acetate’ (DMPA) may increase women’s risk of HIV and STIs, however there has been little research on the effect of DMPA on HSV-2 (Herpes) and HIV acquisition among sex workers.

## The Question

What are the effects of the injectable hormonal contraception DMPA on the acquisition of HSV-2 among sex workers in Vancouver, BC?

## The Study

The Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) research team drew upon data collected through **interviews and laboratory data with 143 women in sex work in Metro Vancouver between 2010 and 2014**. This project is part of AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), an ongoing study on working conditions, health and safety in the sex industry led by GSHI/BCCfE and UBC, in collaboration with a range of community partners, with ongoing outreach to street and indoor sex work venues (by experiential and non-experiential team).

## The Results

During the study period, **19 women (13%) reported using DMPA** for pregnancy prevention, and **39 acquired HSV-2**.

DMPA use was **higher among marginalized populations** already at risk of poor health outcomes.

Rates of HSV-2 acquisition among women sex workers in Vancouver were among the **highest rates ever reported worldwide**.

DMPA use was independently associated with **approximately 4 times increased risk** of HSV-2 acquisition.

*Women in sex work using DMPA for pregnancy prevention were found to be approximately 4 times more likely to acquire HSV-2 than women in sex work not using DMPA.*

## The Policy Implications

- This study raises strong concerns about **how to provide the best reproductive and sexual health care** to women sex workers in Vancouver.
- There is an urgent need for **women sex workers to be given opportunities to be involved** in the development of tailored reproductive health services and to improve access to a wider range of contraceptive methods.

Socias ME, Duff P, Shoveller J, Montaner JS, Nguyen P, Ogilvie G, Shannon K. Use of Injectable Hormonal Contraception Independently Predicts HSV-2 Acquisition in a Cohort of Street and Off-Street Sex Workers in Vancouver, Canada. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 2016.