Objective. To estimate the prevalence of the hepatitis C virus (HCV) and HIV infection and associated risk behaviors among injection drug users (IDUs) in two northern Mexican cities.

Material and Methods. Between February and April 2005, IDUs were recruited in Tijuana (N=222) and Ciudad Juarez (N=206) using respondent-driven sampling (RDS), a chain referral sampling approach. Interviewer-administered questionnaires assessed drug-using behaviors during the prior six months. Venous blood was collected for immunoassays to detect HIV and HCV antibodies. For HIV, Western blot or immunofluorescence assay was used for confirmatory testing. Final HCV antibody prevalence was estimated using RDS adjustments.

Results. Overall, HCV and HIV prevalence was 96.0% and 2.8%, respectively, and was similar in both cities. Most IDUs (87.5%) reported passing on their used injection equipment to others, and 85.9% had received used equipment from others.

Conclusions. HIV prevalence was relatively high given the prevalence of HIV in the general population, and HCV prevalence was extremely high among IDUs in Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez. Frequent sharing practices indicate a high potential for continued transmission for both infections. HCV counseling and testing for IDUs in Mexico and interventions to reduce sharing of injection equipment are needed.

Keywords
Hepatitis C virus; human immunodeficiency virus; injection drug use; Mexico; needle sharing