



The Editor
Macarthur Chronicle
Macarthur Place,
Cnr Kellicar Rd & Bolger St,
Campbelltown NSW 2560

Dear Editor

In your article "Needle fears grow" (Macarthur Chronicle, June 2, 2009) you stated that Kylie Burke, the mother of a five year old boy, who was pricked by a syringe left dumped in a chocolate box in front of the family's Claymore home, now faced a nerve-racking three month wait for test results to reveal whether or not her son has contracted HIV or hepatitis C.

We appreciate that this unfortunate accident is very stressful for Ms Burke, her son and her family, as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV are viruses which can be transmitted when contaminated blood enters the blood stream of another person.

However, we hope that while Ms Burke awaits her child's results, she is reassured by knowing that the chance of her son being infected with any of these viruses, by this kind of needle-stick injury, is considered very low.

Even in the healthcare setting, where a worker accidentally receives a needle stick injury from a syringe containing blood with the hepatitis C virus in it, the chances of that worker contracting hepatitis C is between 3-5 per cent. The chance of contracting HIV that way is even lower, around 0.3 of 1 per cent.

Accidental needle stick injuries from syringes discarded on beaches, streets and in parks carry an even lower risk of infection, as a result of the virus being exposed to environmental factors.

It would be helpful if the reporting of needle-stick incidences included this information.

Whilst we agree with Ms Burke that the discarding of needles and syringes in public places is irresponsible, generally people who inject illicit drugs are very diligent when it comes to disposing of used injecting equipment properly. Continued education on responsible disposal of used equipment remains an important matter for the community.

Housing NSW, having responded within hours of receiving the report, and clearing the dumped rubbish urgently, is an example of the strategies NSW has in place to respond efficiently in such cases.

If members of the public find a syringe in a public setting they should not pick it up, but rather call the NSW Health Needle Clean Up Hotline on 1800 633 353.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stuart Loveday". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stuart Loveday
Executive Officer
Hepatitis C Council of NSW

2 June 2009

Hepatitis C Council of NSW Inc

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