Timing of income assistance payment and overdose patterns at a Canadian supervised injection facility

What is the study about?

• Most people on income assistance in BC get their money through a single monthly cheque, usually on the last Wednesday of the month. This day is known as “cheque day” or “Welfare Wednesday”.
• The study looked at whether cheque day is associated with any health or social harms related to drug use.

How was the study done?

• Overdose and drug use data was collected at Insite, Vancouver Coastal’s supervised injection site, between March 2004 and December 2010.
• By identifying overdose incidents on or immediately after cheque day and comparing them to incidents occurring on all other days, researchers were able to see trends in the timing of non-fatal overdoses.

What did the study find?

• The risk of non-fatal overdose among people injecting drugs at Insite was over two times more likely on or immediately after cheque day.
• This was linked to riskier injections taking place, and was not explained by a simple increase in injecting.

Why is the study important?

• There are clear health risks linked to cheque day.
• There is a need to explore different approaches to how income assistance is given out in BC.