

Practices to Reduce the Transmission of Hepatitis C

- It is safest not to take drugs.
- If you do take drugs it is safer not to ever inject.
- If you inject drugs never share any injecting equipment and always be blood aware.
- Safer Injecting is a set of precautions and practices aimed at preventing the occurrence of related harms when injecting drugs. For example preventing the transmission of blood borne viruses and developing abscesses or other health issues relating to injecting drug use.
- Safer Injecting is really important for people living with hepatitis C because they can become re-infected or co infected (with another blood borne virus or another genotype of the hepatitis C virus).
- The most effective way for people who inject drugs to gain knowledge to reduce the likelihood of the transmission of hepatitis C and other blood borne viruses is through peer education. The peer-based approach is focussed on respect and a recognition that people who use drugs can and do educate and learn from each other in their everyday interactions.
- The techniques of safer injecting aim to prevent exposure to blood borne viruses and bacterial infections that could occur while injecting.
- Safer injecting practices include:
 - Wiping down the preparation area (using soap and water);
 - Wash your hands before and after injecting; and
 - Using a new sterile needle and syringe and clean or sterile injecting equipment, clean water, sterile swabs (one to swab the spoon and one to swab the injection site) a tourniquet not used by others, a new filter and an appropriate disposal bin.
- Sterile equipment has undergone a process that destroys bacteria, viruses and other infectious agents. It includes pre-packaged needles and syringes, water and swabs that are marked as sterile. Sterile water is not essential, water from a tap is sufficient. All other equipment, the injecting space and hands need to be cleaned with soap and water or with swabs.

Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs)

- The main way in which people who inject drugs acquire clean injecting equipment is by accessing NSPs. They are generally open during business hours however, some are open at weekends and have extended opening hours. In addition to equipment provision, NSPs provide people with disposal bins and collect and safely dispose of used equipment. Some pharmacies provide injecting equipment and this is an important outlet as they are often open when NSPs are closed.

- NSPs also provide education and counseling and referrals to treatment services.
- Safer injecting practices are more than just using new and sterile equipment. Being aware of how easy it is for blood to be transmitted is very important. Blood in microscopic amounts can get into a shared mix, filters or water, on tourniquets and onto injection sites.
- All Injecting equipment should never be shared

Disposal of Injecting Equipment and related paraphernalia

The majority of people that inject drugs dispose of their injecting equipment safely. However, for numerous reasons such as limited access to disposal services and fear of police attention at times people dispose of their equipment unsafely.

Should a person find a syringe that has been disposed of in the community they are advised not to pick it up and to call the local council sharps disposal service who will come and collect and safely dispose of it.

People who inject drugs are encouraged to dispose of their equipment and related paraphernalia in the following way:

- Dispose of the rinsing water immediately so that no-one else can use it and contaminate their equipment
- Recap their own syringe and dispose of it in a disposal container or a puncture proof, child proof container and return it to a Needle and Syringe Program or dispose of it in a community disposal bin.
- People are not advised to recap other people's syringes.
- Swabs, filters and other equipment (not the syringe) can be disposed of in tied plastic bags and placed within general rubbish bins.