



HEP C PREVENTION FOR INJECTING DRUG USERS

The following is intended to provide safer injecting practices for people who inject drugs. The best way to avoid getting hepatitis C and other blood-borne viruses is not to inject. When you start injecting you increase the risk of a fatal overdose, catching infections like hepatitis C, hepatitis B and HIV, collapsing veins, and developing abscesses (a pocket of pus under the skin) and painful lumps at injection sites.

If you don't inject don't start now!

Safer injecting practices can help prevent the transmission of hepatitis C and other blood-borne viruses. If you have hepatitis C it is still important to protect yourself as you can be infected again with a different or same strain of hepatitis C or with hepatitis B or HIV.

Blood-borne viruses such as hepatitis C can live outside the body hours to days. Even microscopic amounts (too small to see) of blood can transmit hepatitis C and blood can be transferred from one person to the next while injecting.

When injecting it is important to do so safely and carefully. The best way to play it safe is to always inject with:

- a new fit (needle and syringe),
- new sterile water (where available a new ampoule of sterile water is best),
- new swabs (at least one to swab your spoon and one to swab your injecting site remember to swab in one direction only, rubbing back and forth with a swab spreads dirt and germs),
- your own tourniquet - never share,
- new filter,
- a clean spoon,
- a clean injecting space,
- clean hands (wash your hands thoroughly), and
- an approved disposal bin (always dispose of your fits in a puncture proof container).

The following provides some information on how to avoid getting infections such as hepatitis C while injecting. If you require more information about safer injecting contact your local Needle and Syringe Program. Information can also be obtained through the Alcohol and Drug Information Service or the User Group in your State or Territory and for further information about hepatitis C contact your local Hepatitis Council (see Contacts).

STEPS TO SAFER INJECTING

Preparation

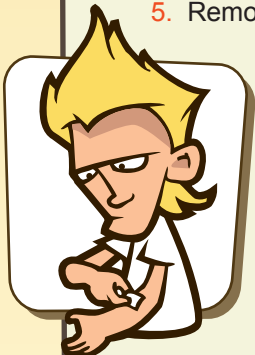
1. Choose a safe place to inject: one that it is private, clean, well lit with running water, if possible.
2. Use soapy water to wipe down the surface where you'll prepare your hit or lay down the paper bag your equipment came in.
3. Make sure you have everything you need within reach: new sterile fits, new sterile water (or cooled boiled water in a clean glass), new swabs, a clean tourniquet, a clean filter, and clean spoon.
4. Wash your hands in warm soapy water. Hand washing is very important to remove viruses, bacteria and dirt from your injecting environment. If you can't wash your hands use single wipes with new swabs to clean them. Swab in one direction only, rubbing swabs backwards and forwards spreads the dirt and bacteria around.





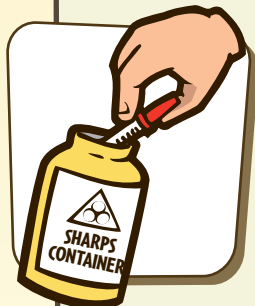
Mixing Up

1. Clean the spoon by wiping once with a new swab and let it dry. Put the drugs in the spoon.
2. Use your new sterile fit to draw up water from the new ampoule of sterile water (or cooled boiled water in a clean glass).
3. No matter how well it has been cleaned, never let your used equipment or anyone else's come into contact with a group mix. Unless new sterile fits are used to mix and divide up, each person must have their own equipment.
4. Add the water to the spoon and mix. You can use the blunt end of your syringe, which you have swabbed clean with one wipe of a new swab, for mixing. Add the filter to the spoon. Good filters include a new swab, tampon or cotton bud. If you are injecting pills, use pill filters if you can get them; if you can't get them, filter at least three times. Draw the solution up through the filter to remove impurities.
5. Remove air bubbles by pointing the needle skywards and flicking it on the side. Push the plunger up slowly until the air bubbles escape through the eye of the needle.



Injecting

1. Wipe the injection site once with a new swab and place the tourniquet around your upper arm (or above the injection site). If you have trouble finding a vein, release the tourniquet and try again. Don't leave the tourniquet on too long.
2. Try not to touch anything that hasn't been cleaned until you have finished injecting.
3. Put the needle into your arm at a 45-degree angle, with the hole facing up. Blood will sometimes appear in the barrel when the needle is inserted in the vein. Pull back (jack back) the plunger and blood should appear. If there is still no visible blood in the fit, remove the needle and tourniquet from your arm, apply pressure (using a cotton ball, tissue or toilet paper) to stop any bleeding, take a deep breath and start again.
4. When you are sure the needle is in the vein, loosen the tourniquet and slowly depress the plunger. If you feel any resistance or pain, you may have missed the vein and will need to start again.
5. Remove needle, keep your arm straight, and apply pressure to the injection site for a couple of minutes (using a cotton ball, tissue or toilet paper). Don't use a swab to stop the bleeding it may in fact stop the blood from clotting.



Cleaning Up

1. Even if you are disposing of your fit, rinse it with clean cold tap water, straight after your hit. This will remove most of the blood and prevent it from blocking and help reduce the likelihood of dirty hits if you have to use the fit again. Dispose of the rinsing water immediately, so no one else can use it and contaminate their equipment with your blood.
2. Recap your own fit and dispose of it in a disposal container or a puncture-proof, child-proof container and return to your nearest NSP. Don't recap other people's fits.
3. Wipe down the area where you have mixed up with soapy (detergent) water. Where there is a possibility of skin contact, the area should be then wiped with household bleach.
4. Don't re-use swabs, filters, or open water ampoules: they can become contaminated once opened.
5. When you have cleaned up, wash your hands and arms with warm soapy water. If this is impossible, use single wipes with new swabs instead. Store all equipment in a clean, safe place.

VEIN CARE

How do your veins collapse?

The lining of a vein is very smooth so that blood can flow easily. Needles, drugs (especially pills), infection, injecting too often or too fast and 'flushing' the syringe can all damage the smooth lining of veins. Damage to the lining will cause problems with the flow of blood, which then causes clots to form on the inside of the vein. The more clots that form, the narrower the vein gets and eventually the vein can completely block. The clots turn into scar tissue which shrinks and pulls the side of the vein together and collapses the vein.

What can happen to you if your veins start to collapse?

If your veins start to collapse, your blood will use other veins nearby to get back to your heart. But if the damage increases, eventually the amount of blood being carried out of the limb becomes less than that pumped by the heart. In the end your arm or more seriously your leg will become permanently swollen, cold and painful. This obstruction of blood flow back to the heart can also cause the skin to break out in very painful weeping sores (called ulcers) that sometimes never heal.

How to avoid veins from collapsing?

- **Rotate sites** – if you can inject in both arms and vary the places you inject into you give the site a chance to heal. If you are running out of veins in your arms please think seriously about switching to less risky ways of taking drugs such as swallowing before injecting into high risk sites like the neck or groin. Injecting into neck or groin increases the risk of hitting an artery which in some cases can be fatal.
- **Use the smallest size needle that you can** – a bigger needle can cause unnecessary damage to the vein.
- **Avoid missing the vein** – if some of the hit leaks into the tissue around your vein it can become painful and swollen, cause abscesses and can drastically shorten the life of veins.
- **Avoid 'flushing' after your hit** – Drawing blood into the syringe and 'flushing' it out after an injection will not increase the amount of drugs in your system at all, but will shorten the life of your veins.
- **Avoid infections** – The safest way to avoid infections, abscesses and viruses such as hepatitis C is to always wash your hands and the injection site before and after injecting, use new sterile equipment and clean your mixing equipment.
- **Don't inject pills** – Injecting pills or capsules is particularly dangerous as the chalk from pills or gel from capsules can block blood-vessels which can cause loss of blood to fingers or toes resulting in possible amputation and in severe cases can lead to stroke or heart failure.
- **Forget about 'new veins' they don't exist** – Sometimes people think that they've found a new vein but as veins collapse the blood gets redirected through smaller and smaller veins. If the pressure in the small vein gets too great, it can 'blow up' like a balloon.
- **Don't make the tourniquet too tight** – Putting a tourniquet on too tightly (should be able to feel a pulse in your arm) can restrict the flow of blood making the vein thinner and easier to miss.
- **Don't inject cocaine** – Cocaine has a numbing effect on the veins which means it is harder to know when you're missing the vein.

VACCINATIONS

If you have hepatitis C, inject drugs or think you might be at risk of getting hepatitis A or B it is recommended that you get vaccinated so that you protect your liver from other hepatitis viruses.

Vaccinations are usually an injection given by a doctor that stops you from getting a virus, such as the hepatitis A or B virus. There is no vaccination at this time for hepatitis C.

You can get hepatitis A and B vaccinations from a GP (there will be a cost involved). From time to time some health services and needle exchange programs (NSPs) offer free hepatitis B injections. This service may be advertised in various places e.g. local newspapers, youth services and NSPs.

CONTACTS

Alcohol and Drug Information Services

The Australian Drug Information Network (ADIN) provides a service directory for alcohol and drug services in each state on their website. Visit www.adin.com.au and select the *Alcohol and drug services* topic centre.

Drug User Organisations

ACT

CAHMA: cahma@aivl.org.au
AIVL: (02) 6279 1600

NSW

NUAA: (02) 8354 7300

NT

NAPNT: (08) 8941 9921

QLD

QUIHN: (07) 3620 8111
1800 172 076 (outside Brisbane)

SA

SAVIVE: (08) 8334 1699

TAS

TasCAHRD: (03) 6234 1242

VIC

VIVAIDS: (03) 9329 1500

WA

WASUA: (08) 9321 4377

Hepatitis Councils

For more information on hepatitis C please contact the national infoline 1300 HEP ABC (1300 437 222). The national infoline diverts to information and support lines at the state/territory Hepatitis Council.

Hepatitis Websites

Hep C & Me

Hepatitis Australia's website for young people, www.hspace.org.au provides information on hep C, how to avoid getting it and how to manage it if you do have it.

Hepatitis Australia website

The Hepatitis Australia website has extensive information on hepatitis A, B and C. Visit www.hepatitisaustralia.com to find out more.

What is this Hep C thing?

www.hepc.com.au is an interactive website for secondary school students which takes visitors through a scenario of the do's and don'ts of getting unsterile tattoos.

HepCTransmission.com

www.hepctransmission.com is a site by young people for young people. This site has two mini-movies on hep C made by Viet youth.

Help Lines

Kids Help Line - 1800 551 800

Kids Help Line is a free, confidential and anonymous, telephone and online counselling service specifically for people aged between 5 and 25.

Lifeline - 131114

Lifeline is staffed by trained volunteer telephone counsellors who provide generalist counselling to anyone needing emotional support.