

# CONNECTING

A Guide to Using Harm  
Reduction Supplies as  
Engagement Tools



**Connecting - A Guide to Using Harm Reduction Supplies as Engagement Tools was developed to support frontline workers in their day to day work.**

This Guide is dedicated to all the individuals who have trusted frontline workers in sharing their experiences. Through these connections and relationships, programs and services continue to evolve.



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**SAFER**

**INJECTING**



# SAFER INJECTING SUPPLIES

## Supplies used for INJECTING DRUGS

- Needles, syringes, tourniquets, alcohol swabs, dry swabs

## Supplies used for DRUG PREPARATION

- BZK wipes, sterile water, cookers, and filters (vitamin C - optional)

Drug-injecting equipment should not be shared. This includes syringes, needles, cookers, filters, sterile water, alcohol swabs, dry swabs and tourniquets.

The smallest traces of blood can remain on used injection equipment, and if shared, can transmit infections like HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.



### Sample of 1 (single) Use Safer Injecting Kit

| Supply  | Single Kit  | 3 Needle Kit  |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Needle and syringe</b>   | 1 fixed needle to a syringe <b>OR</b><br>1 needle tip + 1 barrel = 1 unit | 3 fixed needles to syringes <b>OR</b><br>3 needle tips + 3 barrels = 3 units  |
| <b>Cooker</b>   | 1 Stericup <b>OR</b> 1 One-Use Cooker<br><b>OR</b> 1 Spoon = 1 unit       | 3 Stericups <b>OR</b> 3 One-Use Cookers <b>OR</b><br>3 Spoons = 3 units   |
| <b>Sterile water</b>  | 1 sterile water ampoule = 1 unit  | 3 sterile water ampoules = 3 units  |
| <b>Filter</b>   | 1 blister pack of 5 filters = 1 unit                                      | If you are distributing Stericup or One-Use Cookers, there is <b>one filter in each package</b> . The Spoon cooker does not include a filter, so filter blister packs will be needed. |
| <b>Tourniquet</b>   | 1 tourniquet = 1 unit   | A kit of 3 is intended for one person to use, so 1-2 tourniquets should be enough.  |
| <b>Alcohol swab</b>   | 2 alcohol swabs = 2 units   | 6 alcohol swabs = 6 units   |
| <b>Dry swab</b>   | Available in the Stericup and One-Use Cooker packages                     | Available in the Stericup and One-Use Cooker packages   |
| <b>Only include if crack or brown/black tar heroin are common in your community</b> |   |   |
| <b>Vitamin C</b>  | 1 sachet = 1 unit   | 3 sachets = 3 units   |

\*Use the above table to determine amounts for large size kits

# SAFER INJECTING PRACTICES

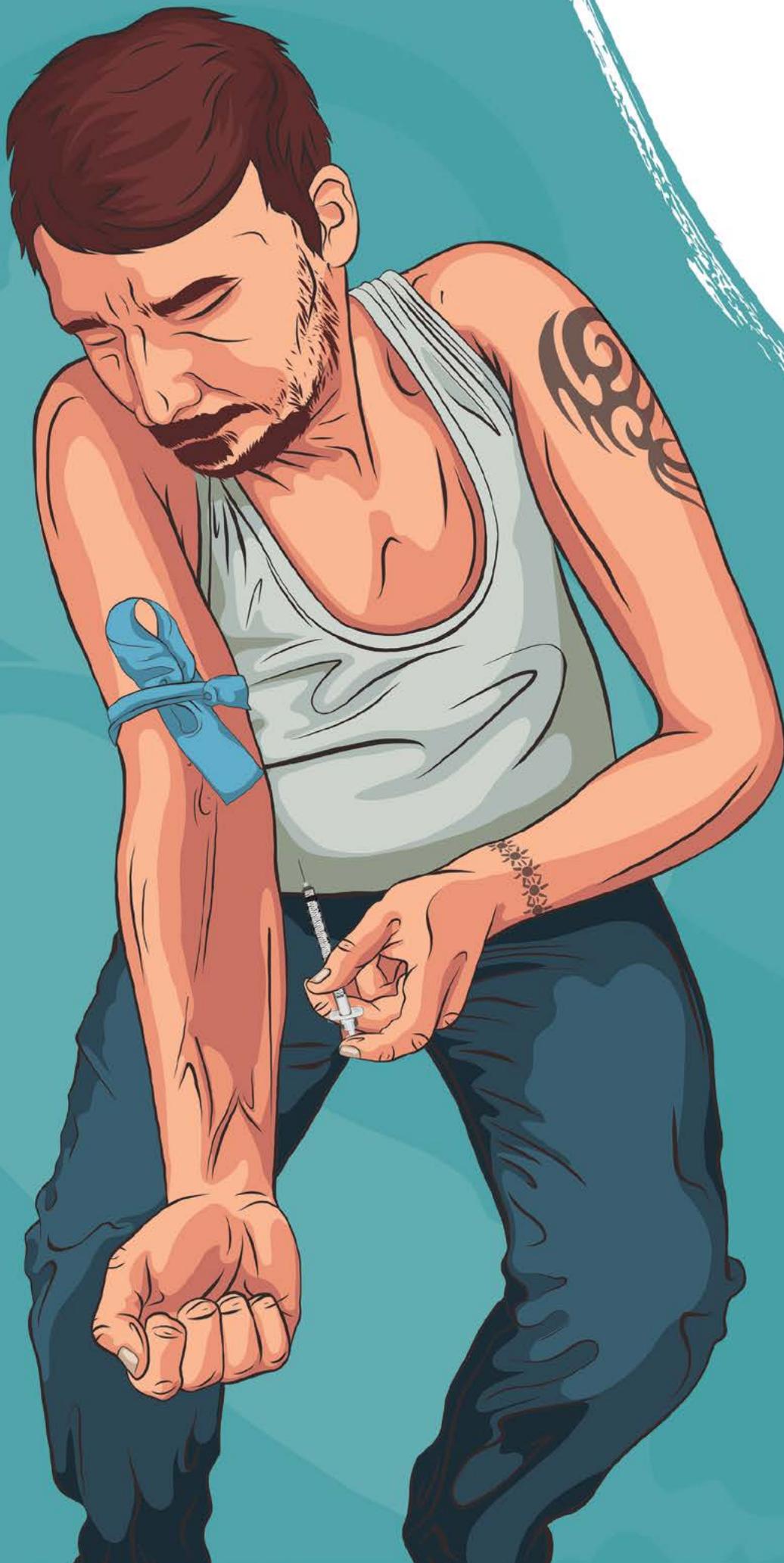
Advice about safer injecting is based on the best practice recommendations. For a number of reasons, following best practices can be a challenge. It is important to stay as close to the best practices as possible. Injecting drugs comes with health risks, but using safer practices can help reduce the risks.

**1** General  
Recommendations  
on Safer Injecting

**2** Preparing Space  
for Injecting

**3** Preparing Drugs

**4** Injecting Drugs



# GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

## ON SAFER INJECTING

### Encourage people to:

- **Use sterile supplies for every injection.**
- **Avoid sharing injection equipment.**  
Blood residue can remain on used supplies making it easier to transmit HIV, hepatitis B and C.
- **Prepare and inject their own drugs if possible.**
- **Use only sterile supplies** if assisting someone, and be careful not to touch any blood.
- **Never inject into arteries.** It's very dangerous to inject into arteries. Blood is under high pressure. If an artery is punctured, it can cause extreme bleeding that is so fast it will not allow time for a clot to form to stop the bleeding.
- **Never inject into arteries.** It's very dangerous to inject into arteries. Blood is under high pressure. If you hit an artery, the blood will force the plunger back and the blood you draw will be a bright red colour. If punctured it can cause extreme bleeding that is so fast it will not allow time for a clot to form to stop the bleeding.
- **Allow injection sites to heal.** Rotate sites and avoid using the same spot repeatedly. Every injection causes damage to the vein wall. If the same spot is used for injecting, a scar can form that can collapse the vein. Damaged or swollen veins may partly recover, but collapsed veins never will.
- **Split drugs before preparing an injection.**  
If splitting drugs with another person, divide them using a new sterile syringe.





# PREPARING

## SPACE FOR INJECTING

### PLAN AHEAD

Bacteria and other microorganisms can enter the body during injection. They enter the bloodstream through veins causing infection and other health complications. Plan ahead to lower risk by keeping the prep and injection space clean.

### Encourage people to:

- When possible, find a safe place that is clean, well-lit and where time can be taken to inject. People are more likely to apply safer practices and not miss their injection when they are not in a rush.
- Always wash hands with soap and water before handling harm reduction supplies. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Risk of infection is reduced by removing bacteria, viruses and dirt from hands.
- Always clean preparation surface with soap and water, BZK wipes, or alcohol swabs. Surfaces not cleaned can contaminate injection equipment.
- Put all equipment needed for injecting on a cleaned surface and have all supplies needed within reach.
- Plan and prepare for overdose, carry naloxone. When possible, avoid using alone, do a test hit, use smaller amounts, and go slowly.

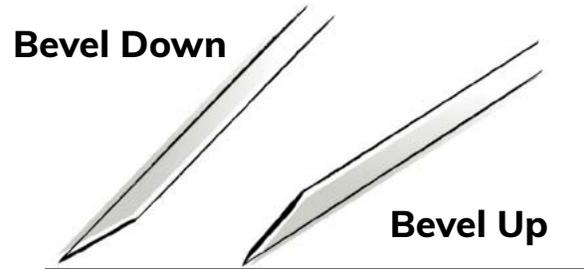
# PREPARING DRUGS

It is easy to introduce bacteria and other microorganisms to equipment. Not all drugs are prepared the same way. Know the safest practices for drug injection to reduce possible harms.

## Encourage people to:

- Use sterile cookers to prepare drugs.
- Add sterile water from a new unopened ampoule and use the blunt end of a sterile syringe to dissolve and mix the solution. Always heat drug solution to a boil. Allow to cool.
- Use a new filter when preparing drugs for injection. It filters out large particles from fillers and cutting agents. The filter can reduce the risk of them being injected into the bloodstream.
- Use a new sterile syringe and needle for every injection. This will minimize risk of infection.
- Avoid injecting multiple times using the same needle and syringe. Needles are sensitive and can become barbed or bent even after one injection. Barbed and bent needles can cause serious damage to the veins.

- Draw up the drug solution by gently laying the hole of the needle (bevel down) on the flat end of the filter.



Needle Tip – Bevel Down vs. Bevel Up

- Remove air bubbles from the drug solution in the syringe. Air bubbles injected into the bloodstream can cause a blockage of blood vessels, known as an air embolism. Point the syringe upwards and lightly tap the sides. This makes the air bubbles rise to the top. Push the plunger slowly to push the bubbles through the needle. Do this until no more air bubbles are in the syringe.



New Needle



Needle Used Once



Needle Used Twice



Needle Used 6 Times

# INJECTING DRUGS

Injecting drugs carries high risk of overdose, infections and damage to veins. Contaminated equipment can pass on viruses, bacteria and other micro-organisms that cause infections and diseases. Improper injection techniques can lead to vascular and tissue damage.

## Recommended practices to DECREASE HEALTH RISKS from injecting drugs:

- 1 Put the fine drug powder in a new sterile single use cooker. If drugs need to be crushed first, try crushing them using a sterile tool (blunt end of the syringe, two cookers or a pill crusher). The finer the particles in the powder, the easier they will dissolve in water.
- 2 Always use sterile water from an unopened ampoule to add to the cooker. Stir the solution with the top of the plunger of a sterile syringe.
- 3 Heat the drug solution to a boil. Let it cool before injecting.
- 4 Add a new sterile filter to the drug solution. Filtering can remove large particles that did not dissolve. These large particles are usually fillers that have been added to the drug. This can also include wax coating found in some pills.
- 5 Insert the needle into the flat end of the filter. Take care not to push it all the way through the bottom, or the sides. The needle hole should face down. Slowly draw the solution up.
- 6 Find a good vein (veins in the arm are always the first choice).
- 7 If unable to find a good vein use a tourniquet. Pump the vein by clenching and unclenching the fist. Veins will look fatter and will be easier to find.
- 8 Slowly insert the needle into the vein at a shallow angle with the needle hole facing up and always pointing toward the heart.
- 9 Pull the plunger until you see blood appear (flagging). If no blood can be seen in the barrel of the syringe, remove the needle and try again.
- 10 Once blood appears in the syringe, untie the tourniquet.
- 11 Once the tourniquet is untied, press the plunger.
- 12 Inject slowly.
- 13 Use the post injection dry swab currently found in the One-Use and Stericup cooker packages to stop bleeding from the injection site. Hold firm pressure for at least 30 seconds.

# SAFER INJECTING ZONES

## Use Arms

Veins close to the skin surface, found in the upper and lower arm, are the safest sites for injecting. Rotating veins regularly will ensure they stay in good shape.

## Use Hands

Hands are less safe than arms because the veins are much smaller. The smaller veins can easily become damaged or bruised. Healing takes longer because circulation is slower. If injecting in hands, the thinnest needle is safest.

## Use Legs Cautiously

Blood circulation in the legs is slower than in hands. Legs are the highest risk area for developing blood clots. Clots can break off and block blood vessels in the heart and lungs. Veins in legs are more difficult to find than in hands, especially ones behind the knees. Injecting in the area behind the knee can lead to accidentally hitting an artery.

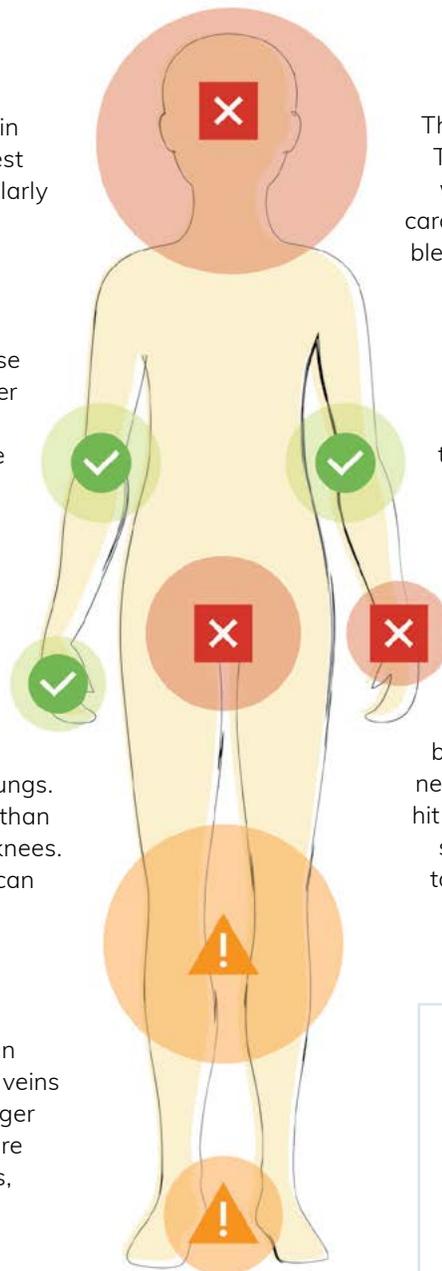
## Use Feet Cautiously

Veins in the feet are much smaller than other parts of the legs. These smaller veins easily become damaged and take longer to recover. Because veins in the feet are close to nerves, cartilage and tendons, any infection can be serious.

Injecting drugs carries risk.

Knowing the safest areas of the body to inject can reduce:

- infection
- hitting an artery or nerve
- causing vein damage



## Avoid Head and Neck

The jugular vein is the riskiest place to inject. The vein lies very close to the carotid artery which brings blood to the brain. Hitting the carotid artery by accident would cause severe bleeding and could be fatal. Abscesses in this area could be very dangerous.

## Avoid Wrists

Nerves, veins and arteries are very close together in the wrists. If bacteria is present during injection, it can cause bone, joint, tendon and soft tissue infection. Injecting in the wrists is dangerous and should be avoided.

## Avoid the Groin Area

The femoral vein in the groin is large but can't be seen. It lies close to the femoral nerve and artery and it's easy to accidentally hit them instead. Hitting the artery can cause severe bleeding and infection and can lead to losing a limb. Hitting the nerve can cause severe pain and lead to nerve damage.

### Never inject into the genitals

The genitals are delicate and injecting in this area can:

- easily damage small blood vessels
- lead to blood clotting
- cause serious infections that can lead to flesh eating disease

# TIPS ON VEIN CARE

- Taking care of veins in the arms, hands and other safe areas will help them stay healthy longer. If veins are kept healthy it can keep people from injecting in more dangerous sites.
- When looking for a vein, take time to find the best site to inject. Rely on sight and touch.
- A tourniquet can make veins more visible and easier to access.
- Rotating injection sites gives veins time to heal before being used again. Just because a certain spot might be the quickest site, it should not be overused. Rotating sites is the key to healthier and longer lasting veins.
- Staying hydrated and injecting in a warm place can make it easier to find a vein and avoid missing an injection.

- Injecting in swollen, inflamed (red) or painful veins should be avoided until they heal.
- **Always use sterile equipment for each injection.**
- Bacteria collects on the palms, between fingers and under nails. Washing hands as often as possible will reduce the risk of infection. It is important to remind individuals to wash their hands before handling harm reduction supplies.
- **Using the thinnest needle will cause the least damage to the veins.**
- **Always insert the needle pointing in the direction of the heart.**
- **Always inject into veins and never into arteries.**

## Main differences between VEINS and ARTERIES are:

| VEINS  | ARTERIES   |
|--|--|
| Veins carry blood to the heart from extremities, neck and head | Arteries carry blood from the heart to all the other parts of the body |
| Veins have no pulse  | Arteries have a pulse  |
| Blood is dark red  | Blood is bright red and frothy   |

# NEEDLES & SYRINGES

Needles and syringes are crucial supplies for injecting drugs.  
Needle tips and syringe barrels come in different sizes and brands.

## A person's choice of needle is determined by:

- their injecting habits, skills and preferences
- their skin thickness and vein size
- the type of drug being used
- where the drugs are being injected:
  - veins (intravenous)
  - skin (skin popping)
  - muscles (muscle popping)

Some sites are safer than others. Using safer sites, like inside the elbow or lower arm, are less likely to cause injury. Injecting in the neck or groin areas are very risky sites.

When people cannot access new supplies, they are more likely to reuse or share needles and syringes. This increases the risk of transmitting blood borne viruses like HIV, hepatitis C and other infections.

A needle tip can become damaged after only one use. Barbed or bent needles can cause damage to skin and veins. This makes it easier for bacteria to enter the body leading to abscesses in the skin or spread throughout the body. A serious infection from bacteria is endocarditis which affects the heart valves.



- For every needle/syringe given out provide a sterile cooker, alcohol swab, filter, and water ampoule.
- Needles and syringes are single use and should never be shared.
- For every needle tip given out, also provide a new syringe barrel.
- Provide needles and syringes in blister packaging for both pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of needles and syringes per person, per visit.

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### DON'T SHARE

Needles and syringes are for personal use and should not be shared. Sharing increases the risk of transmitting HIV, hepatitis B and C, and other infections.

### New EVERY TIME

Use a new, sterile needle and syringe for every injection to reduce risk of infection and vein damage. Infection and vein damage can make it difficult to use some veins. This may lead people to inject into other riskier sites on the body.

### AVOID Reusing

Never attempt to sharpen a used needle. It can become contaminated and create a burr on the needle. Using a damaged needle can cause injury to the veins. It can also weaken the needle and cause it to break off inside the vein.

### Thinnest needle = SMALLEST TRAUMA

Higher gauge needles will lessen trauma to skin and veins. They may also clog more easily depending on the drug.

Thinner needles (e.g. 29G or 30G) are the safest choice for small, delicate veins like those in between fingers and toes.

### SPLITTING Drugs

Always use a new, sterile detachable syringe when splitting drugs. It will reduce the risk of the solution being contaminated with blood from previously used needles and syringes.

### DISPOSAL

Used needles and syringes should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



### Try this line:

**"If you're injecting in your hands, try using thinner needles. Your veins will heal faster."**

# IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS

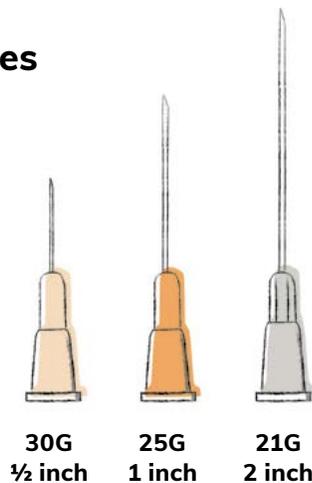
## Needles & Syringes

### Needle GAUGE

Refers to the diameter of the needle. The higher the gauge number (G), the thinner the needle. Standard insulin needles are 27G or 28G.

- Using needles with a smaller gauge (higher number) can result in:
  - less damage to the vein
  - less opportunity for infection
  - increased ability to hit smaller veins
- Intramuscular injections for steroids and other hormones require a large gauge needle (21G or 23G).
- People injecting methadone or certain drugs cut with a lot of impurities that may clog the syringe may also prefer needles with a larger gauge.

### Different Needle Gauges and Lengths



### Needle LENGTH

- Shorter needles (e.g. 5/16 inch or 8mm insulin needles) are commonly used for intravenous injections. A needle too short may miss the vein.
- Longer needles are commonly used for intramuscular injections. A needle too long may puncture through the vein or be difficult to position.

### Needle LUMEN

The needle lumen is the size of the hole in the middle of the needle.

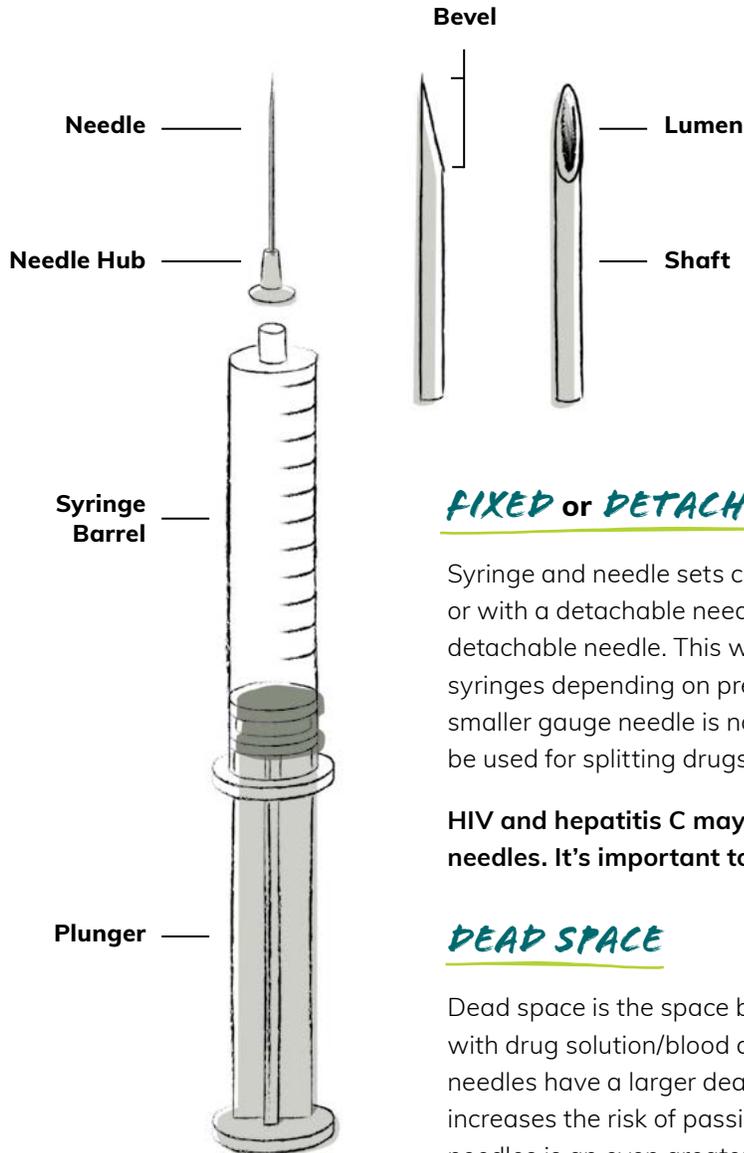
### SYRINGE BARREL Size

The syringe barrel size is the volume of liquid it can hold.

- Most insulin and tuberculin syringes are 1cc or 1/2 cc in size. **1cc = 1ml**
- People injecting drugs requiring more water may prefer a larger barrel size.
- Methadone, steroid or hormone injectors may prefer 3cc syringes.

### BRAND

Each manufacturer makes needles and syringes with different designs. People may need to try different brands to find one they prefer.



**FIXED or DETACHABLE Needles**

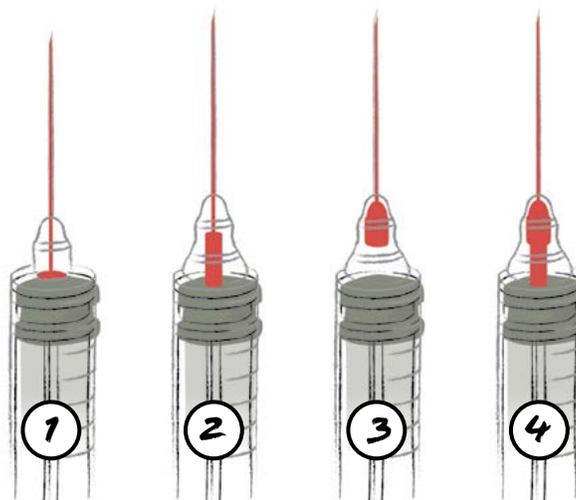
Syringe and needle sets come with a needle attached to the syringe, or with a detachable needle. Some individuals prefer syringes with a detachable needle. This way they can create their own set of needles and syringes depending on preferences. Using a larger syringe barrel with a smaller gauge needle is not uncommon. A sterile detachable syringe can be used for splitting drugs.

**HIV and hepatitis C may live longer in syringes with detachable needles. It's important to never reuse or share a detachable syringe.**

**DEAD SPACE**

Dead space is the space between the plunger and the needle that is filled with drug solution/blood after injection. Syringes made for detachable needles have a larger dead space that holds more blood. Sharing needles increases the risk of passing on blood borne viruses. Sharing detachable needles is an even greater risk.

**Low vs. High Dead Space Needles**



- 1. Syringe with fixed needle – low dead space
- 2. Syringe with detachable needle – low dead space
- 3. Modified syringe with detachable needle – reduced dead space
- 4. Syringe with detachable needle – high dead space

# COOKERS

Cookers (also known as spoons) are metal containers where drugs are mixed and dissolved in water.

Drugs can come in a powder, pill or crystal (rock) form but need to become liquid for injecting. Always heat the solution to a boil to dissolve the drug and kill bacteria/mould/yeast and fungi. Heat the solution by holding a lighter or other heat source beneath the cooker. Let the drug solution cool before injecting.

**Cookers are the most commonly shared supply by people who inject drugs.**

People are more likely to share cookers or use household items when they cannot get sterile supplies. Items like kitchen spoons, bottle caps or the bottom of pop cans are not sterile. They increase the risk of contaminating the drug solution and/or the needle which can lead to infection. Sharing of cookers can involve the drug solution from one cooker being shared between several people or a used cooker being reused by another person. **Reusing or sharing a cooker puts people at risk of blood borne viruses including HIV and hepatitis C and B. Cookers should never be shared or reused.**

## A cooker for safer injection should:

- Come in a sterile package
- Distribute heat evenly
- Have a heat resistant handle
- Have a flat bottom to avoid tipping
- Not contain harmful products or chemicals that could be released when heated



Cookers available through harm reduction programs may be slightly different in design and material. They are of the same high quality.

## Cookers are for single use.

Cookers should be available in a variety of types. People choose cookers for the type of drug and personal preference. Access to sterile cookers reduces use of used or makeshift cookers.

For every needle/syringe given, provide one cooker + one filter + one water ampoule.

Provide cookers in both pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of cookers per person, per visit.

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### AVOID Sharing

Cookers are for personal use and should not be shared. Sharing them can put people at risk of:

- blood borne viruses like HIV, hepatitis B and C
- bacterial and viral infection

### SINGLE Use

A cooker loses its structural stability each time it is heated. For safety, use a new cooker every time.

### COOK the Drugs

Always heat drug mixture until it bubbles to kill bacteria/mould/yeast and fungi.

Quickness to boil will depend on your heat source (lighter, torch lighter, candle).

### COOL the Drugs

Never inject drugs when they are hot.

Cooling the drug solution after it has been heated will help prevent skin burns and damage to veins.

When injecting pills, heating will bring the wax coating to the surface. It can be removed before injecting.

### DISPOSAL

Used cookers should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



### Try this line:

**“Oh, I see you are taking the Spoon cooker, have you tried the One-Use or Stericup cooker? They include a filter and post-injection dry swab.”**



# FILTERS

A sterile filter removes solid particles from the drug solution like undissolved fillers or wax.

The coating and filler in some pills may not dissolve in water and adding more vitamin C\* will not help to break them down. Drawing up the drug solution through a sterile filter can remove solid particles including undissolved fillers or wax. Without a filter, these particles could enter the body or clog the needle. Sterile filters can reduce damage to the body from injecting drugs.

Use only sterile filters from harm reduction programs. Household items like tampons, cigarette filters or Q-tips are not safe because the cotton is loose and long strands can be injected through the needle. Cigarette filters are dangerous because they have small particles of fiberglass that can be injected in the body.

\*Refer to vitamin C section

## A filter should:

- Come in a sterile package
- Come out of the package ready to use without need for touching
- Be a dense pellet with sides having a membrane to ensure filter stability in liquid
- Retain the least amount of drug
- Retain the largest amount of impurities



**Filters are single use and not to be shared.**

**Re-used or shared filters can be a source of bacterial and viral infections. They can retain blood particles that can transmit HIV, hepatitis B and C.**

Provide one sterile filter pack for each needle/syringe given.

Provide filters in both pre-packaged kits and as individual items (packets). There should be no limit on the number of filter packets per person, per visit.

## WHAT IS A WASH?

**A wash is residue that may remain on a used cooker and/or filter from a previous injection. Sometimes the cooker and/or filter is saved to be re-used at a later time.**

While this practice is common, it is dangerous because of the bacteria/mould/yeast and fungi that can grow on the filter and cooker after first use. Blood borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and C can also be present in used filters and cookers. It is important to ALWAYS cook drugs to a boil **every time** to reduce some of these harms.

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### Keep it CLEAN

To decrease chance of contamination, drop the filter straight from the packet to the cooker without touching it.

### SINGLE USE

Filters are one use and not to be shared. Cutting a filter or modifying it can introduce contamination. It can also cause the filter to come apart (loose fibres).

### COOK the Drugs

Always heat drugs to a boil before injecting. Washes are not recommended, but they should always be heated to a boil as well.

### RISKS

- Re-using or sharing a filter puts people at risk of blood borne viruses like HIV, hepatitis B and C.
- Bacteria/mould/yeast and fungi can live and grow on used filters.
- Re-used filters, or filters not designed for injection can cause 'cotton fever', an infection accompanied by fever, sweating, chills and other flu-like symptoms.

### DISPOSAL

Used filters should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



### Try this line:

"Hi! Can I tell you about filters - it's an important step."

**STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE**

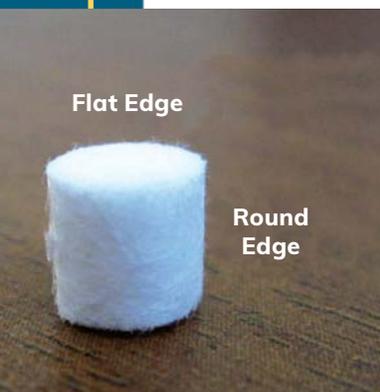
See next page

# FILTERS



- 1** Always wash hands and clean preparation area with soap and water, BZK wipe or alcohol swab.

Before opening the filter packet, pinch the filter with fingers so it does not fall out when opening the package.

**2****3**

- 3** Make sure the flat end of the filter is facing up. Avoid inserting the needle into the round side. It could cause the needle to bend.

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



# 4

Insert the needle into the flat end of the filter with the bevel of the needle facing down.

Make sure the tip of the needle is in the centre of the filter and has not pierced all the way through. If the needle touches the cooker it can damage the tip.

# 5



# 6

Always dispose of filters and other used supplies safely.



# STERILE WATER

To dissolve drugs in powder, pill or rock form you need water. Use **ONLY** sterile water to reduce the risk of infection. Using a newly opened ampoule (container) of sterile water is safest, and unused water should be thrown away. As soon as an ampoule of water is opened, bacteria can get in and start to grow.

Any source of water other than sterile water can contain bacteria. Distilled or spring water are not sterile and may contain more bacteria than tap water.

**Sharing or reusing water can put people at risk for bacterial and viral infections. Always open a new sterile water ampoule for every injection. Each water ampoule is one use.**



Provide single-use, 3ml sterile water ampoules with twist-off caps.

Inhalation or injection grade water can be injected. A 3ml ampoule of water fits in all cookers for a single injection.

**Provide one sterile water ampoule for every cooker and syringe given out.**

Provide sterile water both in pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of water ampoules per person, per visit.

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug prep surface.

### AVOID Sharing Drug Solution

HIV and hepatitis C can be passed on when injection equipment is shared. Shared water can be a source for viral transmission.

### NEW AMPOULE – Every Time

Use a new sterile water ampoule for every injection. Do not keep water for a second injection.

### AVOID Contaminated Water

Bottled water, saliva, or puddles contain bacteria that can cause infection when injected.

### DILUTE the Drugs

Using more water to dilute drugs is better for vein health. Reducing the concentration of the drug can reduce vein irritation.

### COOK THE DRUGS – Every Time

Heat the drug solution until it bubbles and let it cool before injecting. Cooking drugs can kill bacteria/mould/yeast and fungi from the equipment and the drugs.

### DAMAGED Water Ampoules

Never use sterile water ampoules that are leaking or punctured.

### DON'T PUNCTURE the Ampoule

Avoid sticking a needle directly into the ampoule to draw up the water. This can contaminate the water and damage the needle.

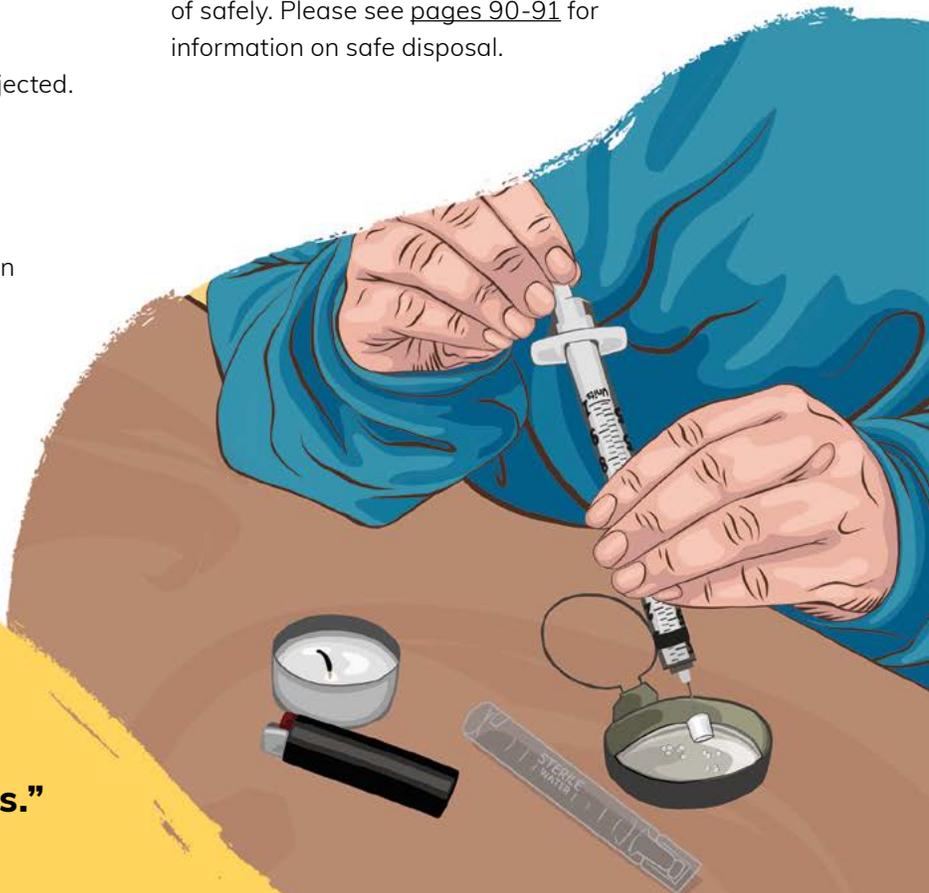
### DISPOSAL

Used water ampoules should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



#### Try this line:

**“You know, the more water you add when mixing, the easier it will be on your veins.”**



# ALCOHOL SWABS

Alcohol swabs are needed to clean an injection site before injecting drugs. If the injection site is not cleaned properly, bacteria can enter the bloodstream and tissues. This can cause infections like abscesses, endocarditis and septicemia (blood poisoning by bacteria and other toxins).

## Other uses for alcohol swabs include:

- Cleaning fingers when soap and water are not available
- Cleaning the drug preparation area
- Cleaning safer inhalation equipment



Alcohol swabs are individually wrapped in sterile, water-resistant packages with a 70% isopropyl alcohol content.

**Alcohol swabs are for personal use only and not to be shared.**

Provide alcohol swabs in both pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of alcohol swabs per person, per visit.

## Alcohol swabs are for EXTERNAL USE ONLY

Do not consume orally. Use of alcohol swabs for non-beverage alcohol can lead to Isopropyl alcohol (IPA) poisoning.

## Symptoms of IPA poisoning include:

- Dizziness
- Stomach pain
- Low body temperature
- Slow breathing
- Vomiting
- Throat pain or burning
- Low blood pressure
- Rapid heart rate
- Slurred speech
- Nausea
- Unresponsive reflexes
- Coma

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug prep surface.

### AVOID Sharing

Alcohol swabs are single use. Used alcohol swabs may contain bacteria and viruses. Sharing them can lead to transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C.

### ONE Direction

Use the new swab once, swiping in one direction before injecting. Do not wipe back and forth as it can move bacteria to an already cleaned area.

### CLEAN the Injection Site

#### – Every Time

Clean the injection site with a new swab every time. Incorrect use of alcohol swabs can contaminate the injection site.

### DO NOT Ingest!

Do not ingest (eat or drink) alcohol swabs. It can lead to alcohol poisoning.

### Keep it CLEAN

After cleaning the injection site, take care not to touch it. Bacteria could be reintroduced to the clean skin.

### Use Only BEFORE Injection

Use an alcohol swab BEFORE injecting only, never after injecting.

### AFTER Injecting

Use a dry swab AFTER injecting. Dry swabs are found in the One-Use and Stericup cooker packages. If a dry swab is not available, use a clean dry tissue or paper towel.

### DISPOSAL

Used alcohol swabs should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



#### Try this line:

**“Hey, do you have enough alcohol swabs? You can also use the swabs to clean your drug prep area. Cleaning it will decrease chance of infection.”**

# TOURNIQUETS

Using a tourniquet or 'tie' helps to make veins easier to find. It restricts blood flow in veins by causing them to swell or bulge out. People new to injecting often can find veins without using a tourniquet.

When a tourniquet is not available people use what they can find, such as belts, bandanas, condoms, wires, ropes or shoelaces. These items are not elastic enough for quick and easy release and can lead to trauma of skin and veins.

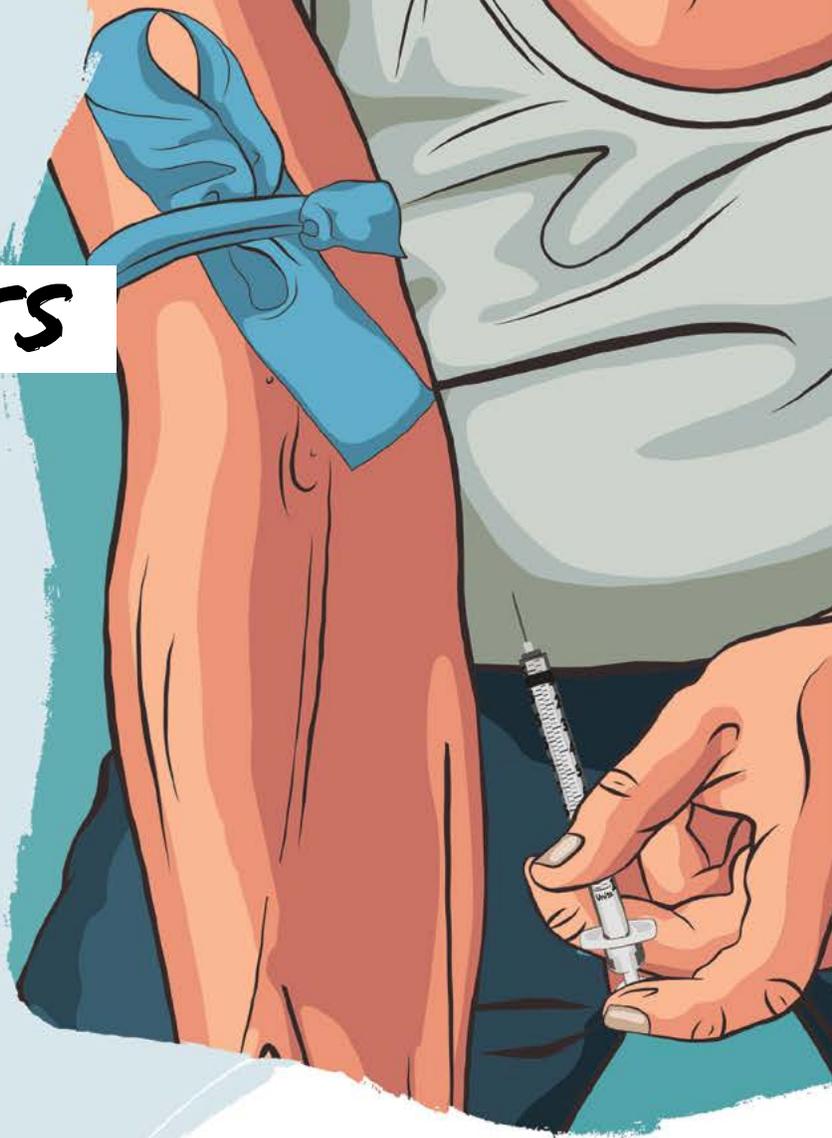


The safest tourniquets are smooth, easy to remove, thin, flexible, non-latex with a non-porous surface. Some veins move when the needle is inserted into the skin (rolling veins). To prevent this, a tourniquet is used to hold the vein in place.

The smallest amount of blood can remain on a tourniquet. Sharing them can put others at risk of hepatitis C and HIV transmission.

**Tourniquets are for personal use only and not to be shared.**

Provide tourniquets in both pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of tourniquets per person, per visit.



## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug prep surface.

### AVOID Sharing

Tourniquets are for personal use and should not be shared. Sharing them could lead to:

- Bacterial and viral infection
- Tissue or vein damage
- Blood circulation problems

### Find a VEIN

Here are some tips to help make veins easier to find when not using a tourniquet:

- Gently massage or slap the vein
- Put a hot washcloth over the vein
- Let arm or leg hang down
- Clench and re-clench the fist
- Windmill (swing arm in a circle)
- Vigorous exercise

### Proper USE

Using a tourniquet correctly can:

- Make veins easier to find
- Prevent long-term vein damage
- Make sure there are less missed injections
- Keep the vein in place by preventing it from moving (rolling vein)

### Know the RISKS

Don't leave the tourniquet on while you inject or after injection. Leaving it on can stop blood circulation, cause a limb to turn blue, lose sensation, and even lead to gangrene.

If not removed before injecting, pressure is needed to get the solution to the vein. This can lead to drug leaking into tissue or vein rupture. The injection site will bleed more easily because of pressure in the vein.

A common reason for a missed hit (injection) is not releasing the tourniquet before injecting.

### DISPOSAL

Used tourniquets should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



### Try this line:

**“If you have trouble finding a vein, try using a tourniquet. It can help the vein pop out.”**

**STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE**

See next page

# TOURNIQUETS



- 1** Lay the tourniquet flat over your bicep (on the area above the elbow).

Take the farthest piece and pull it up under your arm. Put this piece between your teeth and pull the tourniquet. Do not tighten too much. You should feel the pulse beating in your arm.

**2**



**3**

Hold the loose end between your thumb and pointer finger. Wrap this piece around the stretched one.

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



4

Take the loose end and slip it under the tourniquet.

Once it is tied, release the end of the tourniquet that you hold in your mouth.

5



6

Once the needle is in the vein but before injecting, loosen the tourniquet. To remove it, pull the shorter end for a quick release.

# VITAMIN C ASCORBIC ACID

Some drugs will not dissolve with water and heat alone. An acidifier (ascorbic acid also known as Vit C) is needed to make certain drugs into a solution for injection. These drugs (crack and brown/black tar heroin) come in a solid form (rock or powder). The best acidifier to use for these drugs is pharmacy-grade vitamin C. Small sachets of vitamin C are available through harm reduction programs.

**Vitamin C can be harmful if misused, like using too much or when not needed. Using more vitamin C won't break down filler or coating of pills. But it will increase the risks of injecting a very acidic solution.**

When people do not have access to vitamin C from harm reduction programs, they will use household products like lemon juice or vinegar. These products are not sterile, safe or recommended. They are stronger than vitamin C and can:

- Cause pain at the injection site
- Cause vein damage and irritation
- Lead to serious infections

**Lemon juice may contain bacteria and fungus.**

**When injected it can cause:**

- Veins to collapse
- Abscesses (painful pus that has built up in the body tissue)
- Cellulitis (bacterial infection in the deep layers of skin and layers of fat and tissue beneath)
- Heart infection (endocarditis)
- Eye infection causing blindness



Pharmaceutical grade vitamin C available through harm reduction programs is safest for preparing drugs for injection. It comes in 100mg sachets that are air tight and water resistant. 100mg is more than any single injection requires.

**Small single-use sachets of vitamin C can reduce:**

- The risks of sharing ascorbic acid
- The risks from using household acids

Provide vitamin C in both pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of ascorbic acid sachets per person, per visit.

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug prep surface.

### EXPIRY DATE

Always check the vitamin C expiry date on the box before distributing the small sachets.

### SAY NO to Lemon Juice or Vinegar

Using lemon juice, vinegar or other acids can cause health risks and lead to bacterial or fungal infections.

### Start Very SMALL

Start by adding the smallest amount (a pinch). If more is needed to dissolve the drug it can be added (no more than a quarter of the package). This is better than starting with too much and ending up with a very acidic drug solution.

**Remember: if the drug has dissolved but still has solid bits, it is likely filler that shouldn't be injected.**

### Know the RIGHT AMOUNT

**Use the smallest amount of vitamin C to dissolve the drug and avoid damage to veins.**

Once a package has been opened, the content is no longer sterile.

### Can You DRINK IT?

Vitamin C from harm reduction programs is intended for dissolving drugs for injection, not drinking. If too much vitamin C is ingested, the excess will be peed out of the body. Too much at one time (more than 1g or 1,000mg = 10 sachets) can cause stomach upset.

### AVOID Sharing

HIV and hepatitis C can be passed on by sharing used injection related equipment. Vitamin C can be a source of viral transmission if a number of people use the same sachet to prepare injections.

### DISPOSAL

Used vitamin C sachets should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.

#### Is vitamin C needed?

- |                          |                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| ✓ Crack Cocaine          | ✗ Cocaine Powder     |
| ✓ Black/Brown Tar Heroin | ✗ Crystal Meth       |
|                          | ✗ Fentanyl           |
|                          | ✗ Heroin             |
|                          | ✗ Prescription Pills |



#### Try this line:

**“You’d like some Vit C to dissolve crack? Just make sure you don't use too much Vit C, it can hurt your veins.”**

# BZK WIPES

# BENZALKONIUM CHLORIDE

BZK wipes are antiseptic towelettes for cleaning hands when soap and water are not available. They can be an important harm reduction tool for lowering infection rates among people who use drugs by reducing the spread of bacteria and fungi.

BZK wipes can assist with wound care and general hygiene. It is best to have discussions with your organization to determine the messages to provide with this product as there could be medical directives to follow.

Use BZK wipes to clean hands before handling harm reduction equipment. Dirt on the hands carry germs and debris that can transfer to surfaces and objects. Contaminated equipment can allow bacteria to enter the bloodstream. This can result in infections like endocarditis and blood disorders.

Hand sanitizer is not effective if hands have dirt on them. The sanitizer just moves the debris around the hands. In the instance of very dirty hands, handwashing with soap and water or BZK Wipes first is important. Hand sanitizer can then be used afterward.

BZK wipes can be beneficial for individuals who do not have access to soap and water.



Benzalkonium Chloride antiseptic (BZK) wipes are individually wrapped in water-resistant packages for single use.

**Ensure people understand that BZK wipes are not a replacement for alcohol swabs.**

**Washing hands with soap and water is always best.**

Provide BZK wipes as individual items until there is a clear understanding of the specific need for this product and to avoid confusion with alcohol swabs.

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug prep surface.

### AVOID Sharing

BZK wipes are single use and not to be shared or re-used. Sharing them can lead to bacterial infections and transmission of HIV, hepatitis B, and C.

### EXTERNAL Use Only

**BZK wipes are for external use only. If inhaled or ingested, they can cause:**

- Stomach distress
- Nausea
- Respiratory tract irritation
- Vomiting

### DON'T Confuse

BZK Wipes do not replace alcohol swabs. Alcohol swabs remain the most effective product for cleaning an injection site before injecting. Use a dry swab after injecting.

### BE CAREFUL

**Do not use BZK Wipes if there is skin irritation including:**

- Redness
- Edema (swelling)
- Drying
- Cracking

### DISPOSAL

Used BZK wipes should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.

## USE

### BZK Wipe

- Clean hands
- Clean prep surface
- Clean a wound

### Alcohol Swab

- Clean fingers
- Clean prep surface
- Clean injection site

### Dry Swab

Use after injecting to absorb blood (found in cooker packages)



### Try this line:

**“Washing your hands with soap and water is not always possible. BZK wipes are an excellent option if you can’t use soap and water.”**

# PREPARING FENTANYL

## FOR INJECTION

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic (artificial) opioid. It is a downer that slows breathing and heart rate. It is used medically to treat people with severe pain especially after surgery. It is also used as an anaesthetic for surgery.

Fentanyl sold on the streets is often mixed with other drugs. This could be from cross contamination or on purpose. Fentanyl is up to 100 times more potent than morphine. Even small doses can result in overdose and cause breathing to stop.

### Fentanyl comes in these forms:

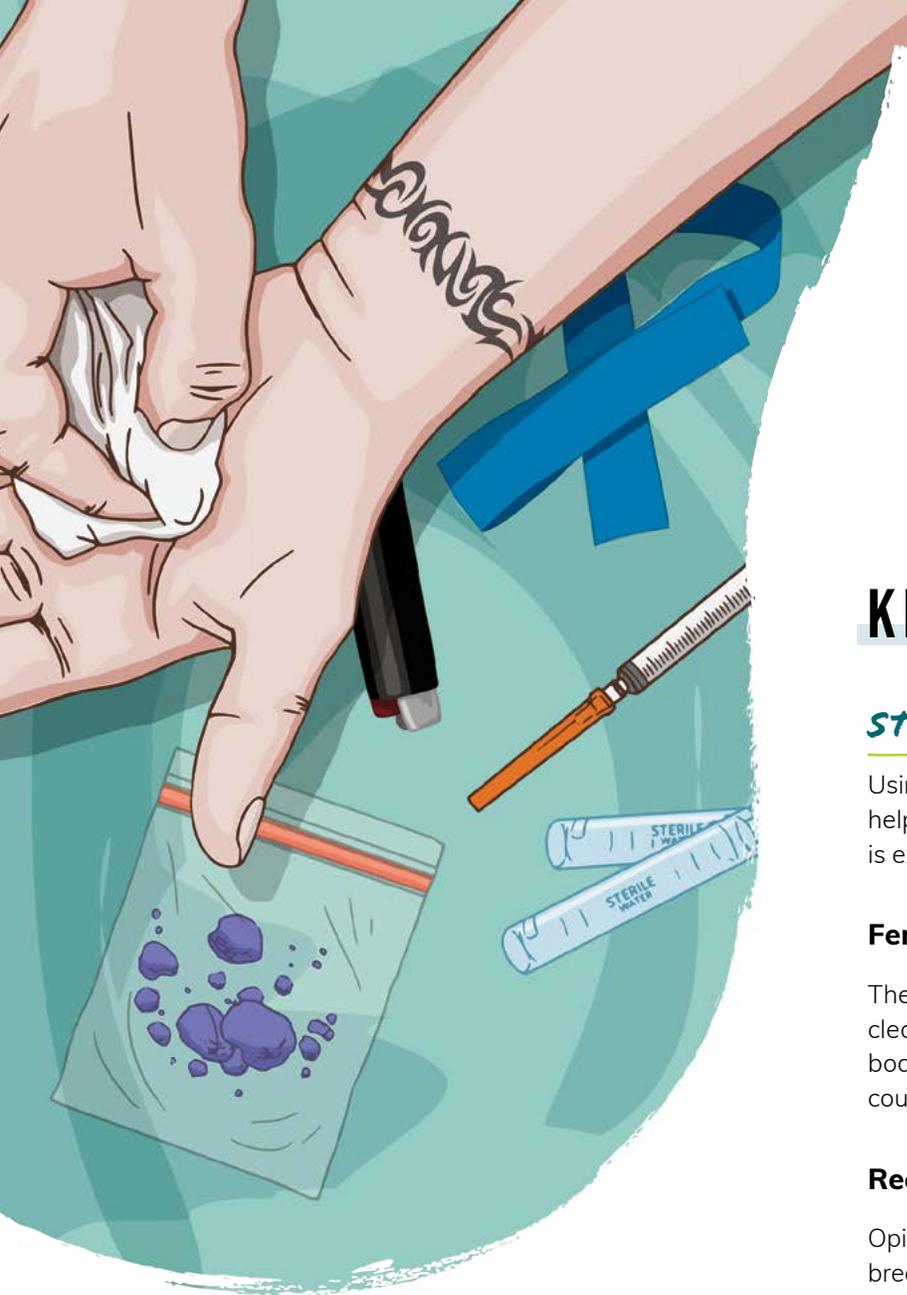
- Pill
- Coloured powder
- Chalky rock that could be a variety of colours
- Transdermal patch

These methods of preparation involve using safer practices. Not all steps can be followed all the time by everyone. It is important to stay as close to safer practices as possible to reduce the risk of health complications.

### A Method for Preparing FENTANYL POWDER/PILLS for Injection

- 1 Put the finely crushed fentanyl powder in a new sterile cooker.
- 2 Add sterile water from a new ampoule.
- 3 Heat the solution to a boil, the drug will be fully dissolved.
- 4 Let the solution cool before injecting.
- 5 Place a new sterile filter into the cooker.
- 6 Insert the needle in the flat end of the filter and slowly draw the drug into the syringe. The bevel of the needle should be facing down in the filter.
- 7 When injecting, the bevel should be facing up and toward the heart.





### Be **AWARE**

Overdose from fentanyl is possible from street or pharmaceutical grades. Fentanyl can be added to other opioid and non-opioid drugs to increase the potency. It is odourless, colourless, and tasteless. It's impossible to tell by the look or smell if fentanyl is in any other street drug.

Accidental opioid overdoses can happen when people use a drug they don't know had fentanyl added to it. Dealers may or may not know their drug product contains fentanyl.

## KEY MESSAGES

### **START LOW, GO SLOW**

Using slowly gives the body time to adjust. It can help prevent taking too much at one time. Fentanyl is extremely strong.

### Fentanyl Acts **FAST**

The initial intense high is often followed by a more clear feeling. It does not mean fentanyl has left the body. Take care because dosing again right away could lead to overdose.

### Recognize the **SIGNS OF OVERDOSE**

Opioids taken in large enough doses can depress breathing and lead to death. It's important to know how to recognize the signs of overdose.

### Carry **NALOXONE**

Encourage everyone to carry a naloxone kit. It is used to reverse opioid overdose only. It has no effect on overdoses caused by other drugs.

### **AVOID** Using Alone

Remind people to avoid using alone and always have naloxone on hand. If possible try to have a plan where a friend could check in on them.

# PREPARING COCAINE & CRACK COCAINE

## FOR INJECTION

**Powdered Cocaine** dissolves easily in water. Always heat the solution to a boil to reduce bacteria/viruses/mould/yeast and fungi.

**Crack Cocaine** does not dissolve well in water. Adding a small amount of vitamin C (ascorbic acid) changes the base in crack to a water soluble cocaine salt. Once fully dissolved, it can be injected. Always use pharmacy grade vitamin C from your harm reduction program. Using household items like lemon juice or vinegar can cause vein damage, infection and other health issues.

People who inject cocaine or crack cocaine tend to use more frequently.

### A Method of Preparing COCAINE for Injection

- 1 Put the finely crushed powder in a new sterile cooker (the finer the powder, the easier it will dissolve).
- 2 Add sterile water from an unopened ampoule.
- 3 Heat the solution until it bubbles.
- 4 Let it cool before injecting.
- 5 Insert a new sterile filter directly from the package.
- 6 Insert the needle tip with bevel facing down gently into the flat end of the filter.
- 7 Draw up the solution slowly into the syringe.

### A Method of Preparing CRACK COCAINE for Injection

- 1 Break rocks into smaller pieces before putting in a new sterile cooker. A pill crusher or two sterile cookers can be used to crush crack cocaine.
- 2 Add sterile water from an unopened ampoule.
- 3 Dissolve crack by adding a very small amount of vitamin C to the drug solution.
- 4 Mix the solution using the plunger of a sterile syringe.
- 5 Heat the drug solution until it bubbles.
- 6 Let it cool before injecting.
- 7 Insert a new sterile filter directly from the package.
- 8 Insert the needle tip with bevel facing down gently into the flat end of the filter.
- 9 Draw up the solution slowly into the syringe.

**These methods of preparation involve using safer practices. Not all steps can be followed all the time by everyone. It is important to stay as close to safer practices as possible to reduce the risk of health complications.**

## KEY MESSAGES

Individuals who inject cocaine and crack cocaine will inject more often. It's important they have access to appropriate amounts of sterile supplies to meet this need.

Encourage planning ahead. Re-using supplies is never recommended.

### **RISKS** from injecting cocaine and crack include:

- Skin damage
- Vein damage

### **ALWAYS** Flag

Cocaine narrows blood vessels and numbs the veins. Always flag (draw blood into the syringe) to make sure the needle is in the vein before injecting.

### Have Ample **SUPPLIES**

Plan ahead to make sure appropriate amounts of sterile supplies are on hand.

### **SPEEDBALLING**

Be very careful if 'speedballing' (injecting cocaine + heroin OR crack + heroin). It increases risk of vein damage and infection of blood borne viruses like HIV and hepatitis C. Speedballing has a higher risk of overdose than injecting crystal meth or heroin alone. It increases risk of death from stroke, heart attack, or respiratory failure.

### Give Time to **HEAL**

Encourage people to sometimes take a break from injecting. It will give their veins time to heal. If that is not possible, encourage that they alternate injection sites.

### **AVOID** Skin Popping

Skin popping (injecting under the skin) should be avoided. Cocaine cannot absorb easily into tissue. This can lead to constricted blood flow and tissue damage.

### Could Contain **FENTANYL**

Drugs in the fentanyl family are sometimes found in cocaine and crack cocaine. Dozing or feeling sleepy right after injecting could mean the cocaine/crack cocaine had fentanyl or other opioids in it. There is no way to tell by colour, taste or smell if fentanyl is in cocaine or crack cocaine.

### Carry **NALOXONE**

Encourage everyone to carry a naloxone kit. It is used to reverse opioid overdose only. It has no effect on overdoses caused by other drugs.

### **AVOID** Using Alone

Remind people to avoid using alone and always have naloxone on hand. If possible, suggest they have a plan for a friend to check in on them.

## **HARMS** of Injecting Cocaine & Crack Cocaine

- These drugs break down quickly in the body (short half-life). This results in a high that is short leading people to inject more often.
- Cocaine can cause temporary loss of pain sensation in the body. Often people do not feel skin, tissue or vein damage caused by poking or moving the needle around.
- Cocaine can narrow the blood vessels. Blood flow is decreased and it takes longer for injection sites or wounds to heal.

# PREPARING CRYSTAL METH FOR INJECTION

Crystal methamphetamine (crystal meth) can come in clear crystal chunks or shiny blue-white rocks. Also called 'ice', 'glass' or 'ish'. It can be swallowed, snorted, injected or smoked.

Injecting crystal meth causes immediate and intense effects. The comedown and craving for more is also intense. This can also be the riskiest method of using crystal meth.

Crystal meth will dissolve with water. Always heat drugs to a boil to reduce bacteria and viruses. Allow to cool before injecting.

## A Method of Preparing CRYSTAL METH for Injection

- 1 Crush rocks into a fine powder. The finer the powder is, the easier it will dissolve. A pill crusher or two sterile cookers can be used to crush crystal meth.
- 2 Place crushed powder in a new sterile cooker.
- 3 Add sterile water from an unopened ampoule.
- 4 Stir using the plunger end of a new sterile syringe.
- 5 Heat the solution until it bubbles.
- 6 Let it cool before injecting to reduce skin burns and damage to veins.
- 7 Place a new sterile filter directly from the package into the cooker.
- 8 Place the needle into the flat end of the filter. The bevel of the needle should be facing down.
- 9 Draw up the solution slowly into the syringe.
- 10 Tap to remove air bubbles.

**This method of preparation involves using safer practices. Not all steps can be followed all the time by everyone. It is important to stay as close to safer practices as possible to reduce the risk of health complications.**

# KEY MESSAGES

## Minimizing RISKS

Different consumption methods present different health risks.

## Health COMPLICATIONS

Injecting crystal meth can lead to health complications such as abscesses, bruises, collapsed veins and infections.

## SKIN POPPING

Crystal meth is released slower when injected under the skin (skin popping) or muscles (muscle popping). It causes a slower onset of effects and less intense high. Both skin or muscle popping of crystal meth can be painful and lead to abscesses.

## SAFER Sex

Crystal meth is sometimes used to enhance sexual activity. People might engage in riskier sex than they would normally have: rougher, aggressive sex without a condom. This increases risk of transmitting HIV, hepatitis B and C, and sexually transmitted diseases. Offering safer crystal meth supplies offers the chance to also provide sex education.

## SPEEDBALLING

Speedballing has a higher risk of overdose than injecting crystal meth or heroin alone. The effects from meth are longer than heroin. A person's heart rate may rapidly change pace from very slow to very quick. The quick change in heart rate and respiration can cause irregular heartbeat, heart failure or stroke.

## Long Term EFFECTS

Extended use of crystal meth can cause impotence. This may lead some people to combine the drug with erectile dysfunction medication (like Viagra®). This combination of drugs puts strain on the heart. If poppers (amyl-nitrate) are added to this combination, it can cause heart failure.

## PROTECT Your Veins

Injecting crystal meth can scar veins or cause them to collapse. It can also cause them to narrow or shrink making it hard to find a healthy vein.

## DO A TEST Shot

Take a test shot before injecting the whole dose. Crystal meth is often cut with other chemicals and the quality and strength/potency can vary.

### Be careful if mixing crystal meth with other drugs:

- 1 Mixing different drugs can increase risk of overdose.
- 2 If trying crystal meth for the first time, it's best to take it on it's own. Combining it with other drugs or alcohol can increase health risks.
  - Combining with other stimulant drugs increases the risk of heart problems, overheating, and can induce psychosis.
  - Combining with depressants (opioids, benzodiazepines, alcohol) increases the risk of heart attack, coma and respiratory failure.

# PREPARING PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS

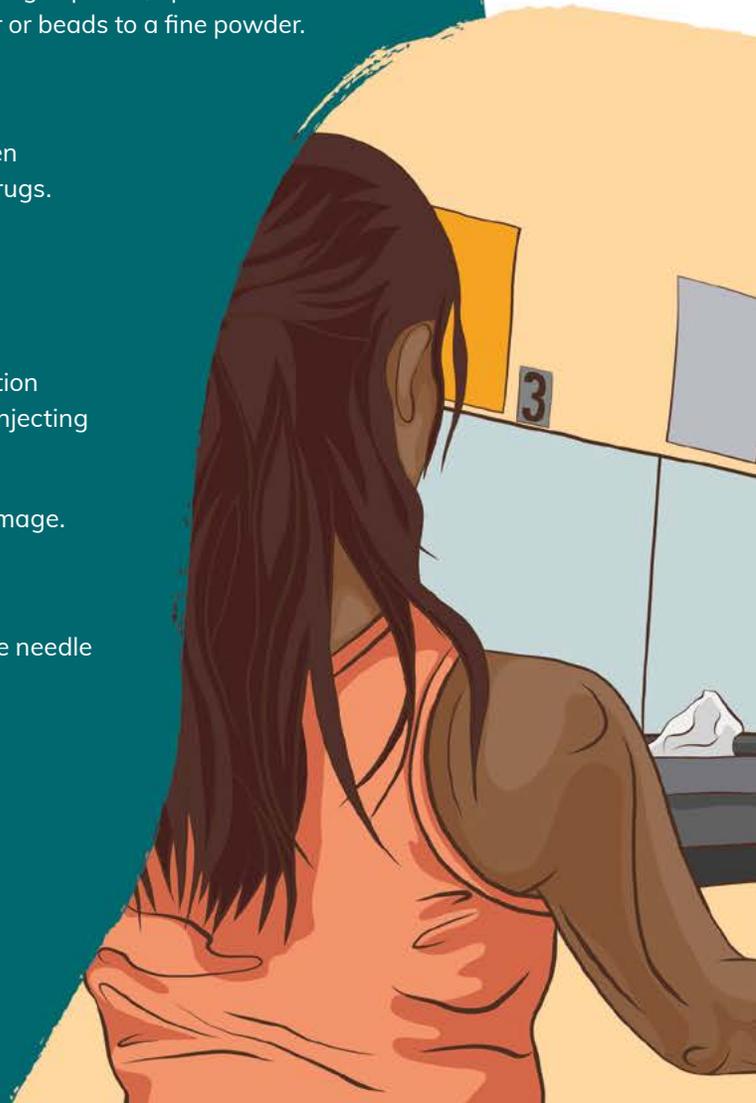
## FOR INJECTION

Injecting prescription opioids is never safe, but using safer practices can reduce harms. This method of preparation uses safer practices. Staying as close to safer practices as possible will reduce the risk of health complications.

### One Way of Preparing PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS for Injection

- 1 Crush pills to a fine powder so they will dissolve easier. If using capsules, open the capsule and empty the powder or beads. Crush the powder or beads to a fine powder.
- 2 Put the finely crushed powder into a new, sterile cooker.
- 3 Add sterile water from a new unopened ampoule. Pills often need more water to dissolve properly compared to other drugs.
- 4 Heat the solution until it bubbles.
- 5 Let the drug solution cool before injecting.
- 6 Some fillers in pills will solidify in the cooker when the solution cools down. They can be removed from the cooker before injecting using sterile tweezers.
- 7 Cooling the solution reduces risk of skin burns and vein damage.
- 8 Place a new sterile filter into the cooker.
- 9 Insert the needle in the flat end of the filter. The bevel of the needle should be facing down.
- 10 Slowly draw the solution up into the syringe.

This method of preparation involves using safer practices. Not all steps can be followed all the time by everyone. It is important to stay as close to safer practices as possible to reduce the risk of health complications.



## KEY MESSAGES

### REMOVE Coating

Any coating on the outside of the pill needs to be removed before injecting.

### CONTROL Bacteria

Pills should never be put in the mouth to remove any coating. Bacteria in saliva (spit) will be passed to the pill and added to the drug solution.

### CRUSHING Pills

Crushing pills to a fine powder and using plenty of sterile water can help them dissolve better.

### COOK the Drugs

It's important to cook drugs every time. Heating drugs to a boil will:

- Reduce bacteria/mould/yeast and fungi that may be on the drug or supplies
- Help separate fillers or binders from the drug

### AVOID Reusing

Drug residue can remain on the cooker and filter after preparing the injection. Some people will add water to the used cooker or filter again (called a 'wash') to make an additional injection. It is recommended to never reuse or share used supplies. Always cook drugs every time, including washes to reduce infection and blood borne viruses.

### Could Contain FENTANYL

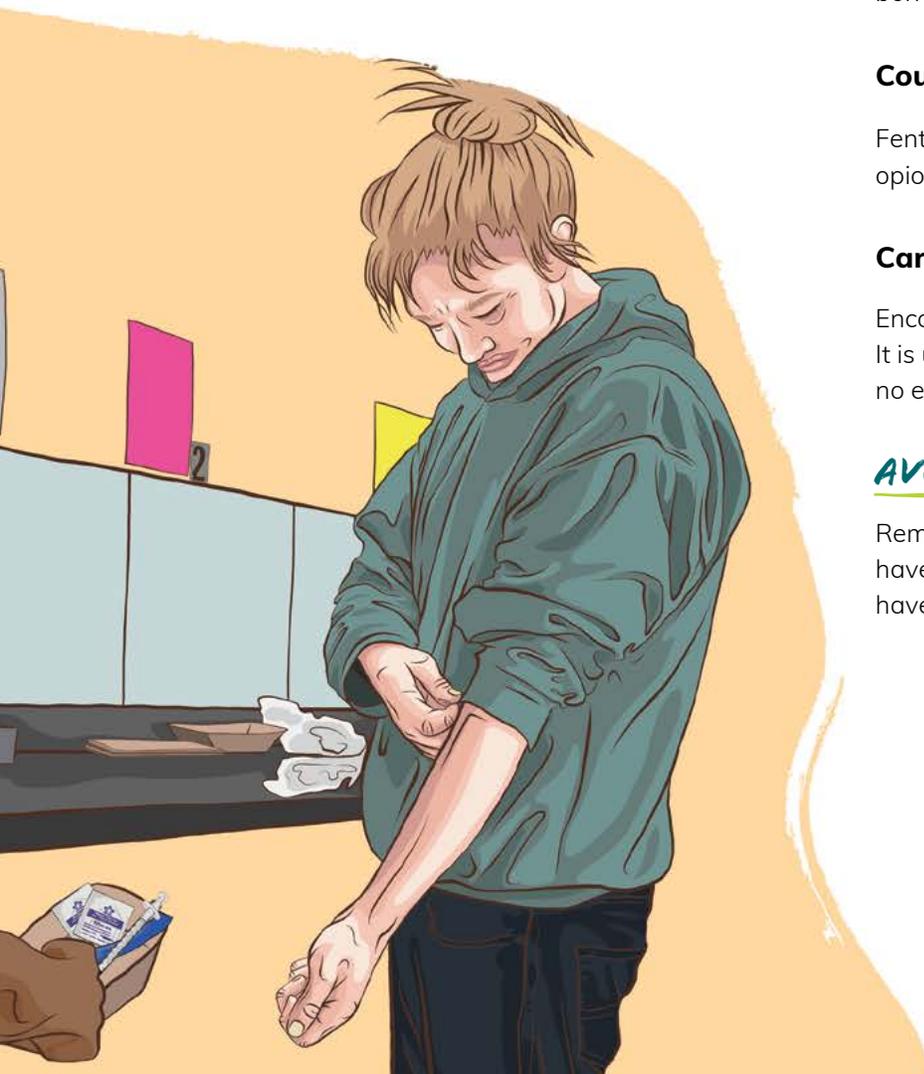
Fentanyl can come in many forms. Sometimes opioids sold on the street can contain fentanyl.

### Carry NALOXONE

Encourage everyone to carry a naloxone kit. It is used to reverse opioid overdose only. It has no effect on overdoses caused by other drugs.

### AVOID Using Alone

Remind people to avoid using alone and always have naloxone on hand. If possible, suggest they have a plan for a friend to check in on them.



## INJECTING PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS

**KNOW THE HARMS -  
REDUCE THE RISKS**

There are many reasons why injecting prescription pills leads to greater harms.

### PILLS CONTAIN MORE THAN JUST THE DRUG

Prescription opioids are not intended for injection. They contain a variety of substances including:

- Starch
- Gelatine
- Wax
- Cellulose
- Other binders (to help keep the substances in the pill together)
- Abuse deterrents (substances that are meant to prevent drug misuse)

These substances can end up in the bloodstream when injected. They can cause significant health complications such as:

- Disruption of red blood cells which carry oxygen to the body
- Thrombosis (blood clotting)
- Remaining in blood circulation as floating blood clots
- Granulomas (nodes of hard tissue created by the body's response to a foreign object)
- Staying as a gelatine or crystal-like form in the veins
- Particles of injected pills and clumps of bacteria can block blood vessels. This blockage can cause an embolism.

## PILLS CONTAIN FILLERS

Preparing prescription pills for injection is not a quick process. The many stages of preparation make it easy to introduce bacteria. Bacteria can cause serious health problems such as:

- Abscesses
- General infection (sepsis) carried throughout the body
- Slowed wound healing
- Bacterial endocarditis (bacterial infection of a heart valve)

## INJECTING PILLS INCREASES RISKS

Injecting pills puts people at higher risk of getting hepatitis C.

Larger syringe barrels (e.g. 3ml or 5ml) generally come with detached needles. These syringes have more dead space. Dead space is the area beyond the plunger that is filled with blood after injecting. More blood in the dead space is known to increase risk of transmitting hepatitis C.

White heroin is water-soluble and dissolves easily when heated. Brown and black tar heroin are not water-soluble and need heat and an acidifier like vitamin C to dissolve properly.

# PREPARING HEROIN

## FOR INJECTION

How drugs are prepared for injection depends on the form of the drug (pill, powder, rock, etc.). How well it will dissolve in water depends on other substances in the drug. It's important to heat all drugs to a boil every time and let it cool before injecting.

Preparing **HEROIN FOR INJECTION** will depend on the type of heroin used.

**For white heroin a safer injection practice would be:**

- 1 Put the finely crushed heroin powder in a new sterile single use cooker.
- 2 Add sterile water from a new ampoule.
- 3 Heat the solution until it bubbles. The drug will be fully dissolved.
- 4 Let the solution cool before injecting.

- 5 Place a new sterile filter into the cooker.
- 6 Insert the needle in the flat end of the filter and slowly draw the drug into the syringe. The bevel of the needle should be facing down in the filter.
- 7 When injecting, the bevel should be facing up and towards the heart.

**For brown or black tar heroin include the following step (before step 3):**

- Add the smallest amount of vitamin C to the drug and water solution before heating.

**This method of preparation involves using safer practices. Not all steps can be followed all the time by everyone. It is important to stay as close to safer practices as possible to reduce the risk of health complications.**





## KEY MESSAGES

### "START LOW, GO SLOW"

A person can lose their tolerance to heroin after just a couple days of not using it.

### OVERDOSE Risk

Many things can increase the chance of overdose for both people with low tolerance and experienced drug users.

#### Risk of overdose increases when:

- Doing too much drug at one time
- Doing too much drug over a short period of time
- Mixing more than one drug at a time

### Buyer BEWARE

Harmful substances are often 'cut' into the drug. Cutting drugs means substances are added to the drug as filler. Filler helps a drug dealer stretch sales.

#### Just a few examples of filler could be:

- Caffeine
- Aspirin
- Baking powder
- Fentanyl
- Sucrose (sugar)
- Laundry detergent
- Starch
- Talcum powder

### Recognize Signs of OVERDOSE

In large doses, heroin can make breathing extremely difficult or even stop. Know how to recognize signs of overdose and give naloxone.

### Carry NALOXONE

Encourage everyone to carry a naloxone kit. It is used to reverse opioid overdose only. It has no effect on overdoses caused by other drugs.

### AVOID Using Alone

Remind people to avoid using alone and always have naloxone on hand. If possible, suggest they have a plan for a friend to check in on them.



**SAFER**

**INHALING**

# SAFER SMOKING SUPPLIES

Providing sterile smoking supplies can prevent injuries and risks from smoking/inhaling/snorting drugs. These supplies can reduce cuts and burns to the lips and mouth. They also prevent transmission of HIV and hepatitis C.

## Safer smoking supplies include:

- Bowl pipes
- Straight stems
- Foil
- Straws
- Mouthpieces
- Brass screens
- Alcohol swabs
- BZK wipes
- Push sticks

Provide safer smoking supplies in both kits and as individual supplies.



Safer crack smoking supplies

## KITS

Kits include all supplies needed for safer smoking/vaping/snorting. The kit will include items depending on the drugs available in your community and what individuals share that they need. Examples of different kits are: **crack, crystal meth, foil/chasing the dragon, and snorting.**



Safer crystal meth smoking supplies

## INDIVIDUAL SAFER SMOKING SUPPLIES

Individual supplies allow a person to choose the type of supply and amount that best suits their needs.

Drugs most often smoked/vaped are crystal meth, crack cocaine and fentanyl. The transmission of HIV and hepatitis C is possible through smoking/vaping. Blood residue from lips or mouth can transfer to smoking/vaping supplies. Residue is then passed to others when supplies are shared.

Other harms include damage to lungs and other organs. These harms can come from using makeshift pipes from hazardous materials. Materials can include glass fragments, retrofitted pipes or stems, and aluminum pop cans. Makeshift pipes can explode when heated, or under extreme temperature changes.

### Safer smoking supplies include:

**Straight stem** – used to inhale vapours such as crack cocaine. Also called a crack pipe.

**Bowl Pipe** – used to inhale vapours such as crystal meth. Also called a meth, bowl, bubble or pipe.

**Foil** – used to smoke/vape different drugs such as fentanyl, crack, or crystal meth.

**Straw** – used for snorting/inhaling drugs.

**Brass Screen** – placed in a straight stem to keep drugs in place. Screen(s) also keep hot pieces from being inhaled into the mouth/throat.

**Mouthpiece** – placed on the mouth end of a bowl pipe or straight stem for safety.

**Alcohol Swab** – to clean fingers and preparation space.

**BZK Wipe** – to clean hands and preparation space.

**Push Stick** – used to prepare and position screens in a straight stem. Can also be used to remove/scrape drug residue from a pipe or stem.

Other useful harm reduction supplies that could be included are: lighters or tea lights, lip balm, bandages, condoms, lubricant, and resource cards. Additional items can be added to kits based on the drugs in the region, frequency of individuals accessing supplies and knowledge of the community.

When packaging kits, use a variety of BAGGIE COLOURS to quickly differentiate the different kits.

## 1 Sample of a Bowl Pipe Kit

### RECOMMENDED

**Bowl pipes** 2 bowl pipes = 2 units

**Mouthpieces** 4 mouthpieces = 4 units

**Alcohol swabs** 2 alcohol swabs = 2 units

## 2 Sample of a Straight Stem Kit

### RECOMMENDED

**Straight stems** 2 straight stem = 2 units

**Brass screens** 4 packages = 4 units

**Push stick** 1 push stick = 1 unit

**Mouthpieces** 2 mouthpieces = 2 units

**Alcohol swabs** 2 alcohol swabs = 2 units

## 3 Sample of a Foil Kit

### RECOMMENDED

**Foil sheets** 2-4 sheets (foil for putting the drug on to smoke/vape from + foil to make a pipe)

**Alcohol swabs** 2 alcohol swabs = 2 units

## 4 Sample of a Snorting Kit

### RECOMMENDED

**Paper straws** 2 straws (different colours) = 2 units

**Foil sheets** 2 foil sheets

**Alcohol swabs** 2 alcohol swabs = 2 units

# STRAIGHT STEMS

Straight stems are intended for smoking drugs in rock form such as crack cocaine. They are also used for smoking any other drug that produces vapour. When heated, the stem funnels vapour of the drug to the mouth. Always use a mouthpiece (to prevent burned lips), and brass screens.

The mouthpiece is fitted to the end of the straight stem and should not be shared. Brass screens are folded and inserted into the stem to make a tight seal. This is to keep small, very hot pieces of drug from being inhaled into the mouth and throat.

**Using a mouthpiece and brass screens with the stem can reduce the risk of hepatitis B and C and other infections.**



Straight stems are made from Pyrex glass which is resistant to high temperatures. They are intended for smoking/vaping.

Saliva and blood from the mouth can transfer to a mouthpiece. Always use your own. Never share.

Replace brass screens in the pipe when they become loose or are falling apart.

Provide straight stems in both pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of straight stems per person, per visit.



## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### AVOID Sharing

There is evidence that hepatitis B and C, pneumonia and tuberculosis can be passed to others when inhalation equipment is shared.

### DON'T Modify

Self-made stems are not safe to use. Modifying the stem in any way increases risk of lip and mouth injury and burns. Retrofitting a straight stem can compromise the glass. It increases the risk of breaking or blowing-up in your hand.

### NOT Scratch Resistant

Always use a wooden push stick for packing screens or removing them. Other items can scratch or damage the glass, weakening it. This could make the stem break or shatter when exposed to heat.

### AVOID Damaged Stems

Throw away and do not reuse a stem that is broken, cracked or has visible blood droplets.

### DISPOSAL

Used straight stems should be disposed of safely. Please see [page 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



#### Replace a straight stem when:

- The stem was used by someone else
- The stem is scratched, chipped or cracked
- The stem is burnt
- Even the smallest trace of blood is on it

**Discourage use of self-made pipes or retrofitted straight stems. They can increase risk of injury and burns.**



#### Try this line:

**"If you can, always use a glass stem from a harm reduction program. They are resistant to high heat and harder to break and chip."**

# BRASS SCREENS

Screens block hot particles from being inhaled into the mouth and throat. The mesh allows drug vapour to flow through. The most common drug used in the straight stem with screens is crack cocaine.

Brass screens are a safer and better quality choice than using household items such as Brillo®. Household items can have chemicals which, when heated will be inhaled. They can also shrink and break apart when heated and damage the inside of the mouth or throat if inhaled.

Brass screens hold drugs in place in a straight stem. Screens are folded and positioned in the stem using a wooden push stick.

Using Brillo® or other types of steel scouring pads is a very unsafe and harmful practice. Small bits of the steel wool can break off and be inhaled while smoking crack. Deeper inhalation or ingestion of the steel shards can burn the airways and anywhere along the route to the stomach.

### Some suggestions to offer individuals who may not be ready to change from using Brillo®:

- 1 Place a brass screen over the mouth end of the straight stem. Then fit a mouthpiece over the top of it making it snug and secure. This is an added layer of protection from having broken pieces of Brillo® inhaled into the mouth/throat.
- 2 Wrapping a brass screen around the Brillo®.
- 3 Packing brass screens in the pipe. Then putting Brillo® closest to the drug.



Screens are made of thin, brass metal sheets. They are highly heat resistant, pliable, and have no chemical coating. They allow for inhalation of drug vapour. Five screens are in each packet.

### Screens are for personal use and should not be shared.

Provide screen packets in both pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of screen packets per person, per visit.



## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### New EVERY TIME

Use new brass screens each time when smoking drugs. Used screens can shrink or shred allowing them to become loose in the stem. If loose, they could be inhaled into the mouth or throat. Always make sure screens are packed tightly.

### Push STICK

Use a push stick to help:

- Mold the screens
- Pack the screens
- Remove the screens

The wooden push stick is less likely to scratch or damage the straight stem than other materials.

### Different METHODS

There is no 'one way' of packing screens. Try different styles of packing until you find one you prefer.

### DISPOSAL

Used screens should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



### Try this line:

“You asked why use brass screens instead of Brillo®? Well, brass screens are far safer to use. They can help prevent burns to the throat and mouth. And they are not coated with potentially toxic chemicals.”

STEP-BY-STEP  
GUIDE

See next page

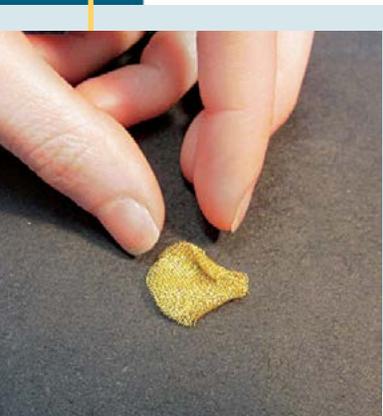
# BRASS SCREENS

This is one method of folding screens for a stem pipe.



- 1** Always wash hands and prep area with soap and water, BZK Wipes or alcohol swab.

Remove screens from packet.  
Stack screens together and fold in  
one side of the stack of screens.

**2****3**

Use thumb to fold in  
the other side so the  
stack of screens has  
a cone shape.

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



4

Roll screens into the middle with the folded sides facing inward.

Press together tightly.

5



6

Insert screens into the stem. Place the stem on prep work space and push the screens down with a wooden stick so they are tightly packed.

Push the screens about 1cm into the stem to allow room for the drug.

7



# BOWL PIPES

Bowl pipes are used for smoking crystal methamphetamine. They are also used for other drugs that produce vapour when heated. The crystals (or other drug) are placed in the bottom of the bowl. A lighter is held beneath the bowl to heat the drug to a vapour.

**Always use a mouthpiece on the bowl pipe.** While pipe sharing is a common practice with people who smoke crystal meth, it is not encouraged. Blood and saliva can remain on the pipe and bacteria or viruses could be shared. Smoke safer by using a personal mouthpiece.

Handing out bowl pipes is a chance to engage with people. By providing harm reduction supplies and education (e.g. safer sex), it opens the door to build relationships.

**Some people retrofit the shape of the bowl pipe. This can increase risk of cracks and breakages by compromising the integrity of the product.**

**IT IS SAFEST TO USE THE PIPE AS IS.**

**Replace a bowl pipe when:**

- The pipe has been used by someone else
- The pipe is scratched, chipped or cracked
- The pipe is burnt

**Bowl pipes have been known to be sold on the street for financial gain. Programs will need to determine if that presents a problem in their community and how to address it.**



Bowl pipes from harm reduction programs are made from Pyrex glass which is much less likely to shatter than regular glass when heated. They are individually wrapped in a foam envelope to prevent breakage.

Provide bowl pipes both in pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of bowl pipes per person, per visit.

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### ALWAYS Use a Mouthpiece

Remind people of the importance of using a personal mouthpiece. For safety and health, don't share your mouthpiece.

### SAFER Sex Education

Provide safer sex information with bowl pipes to reduce the risk of infections and transmission of blood borne viruses.

### SAFE Use

Using bowl pipes from your harm reduction program can help reduce:

- Transmission of hepatitis B and C, pneumonia and tuberculosis (from sharing pipes)
- Injury and burns from using self-made pipes

### Repeated USE

The pipe becomes unsafe to use when:

- It is damaged
- It has been used by someone else
- It is burnt

### AVOID Damaged Pipes

A bowl pipe that is cracked, broken or has visible blood droplets should be thrown away and never used.

### OVERDOSE from Smoking

Overdose is possible when smoking drugs. Learn to recognize the signs of an overdose. Don't use alone.

### DISPOSAL

Used bowl pipes should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



### Try this line:

**“If you notice that the pipe is chipped or cracked, don't use it. Grab a new one instead.”**



# MOUTHPIECES

The mouthpiece is a short vinyl tube that fits tightly on the end of a straight stem or bowl pipe. It protects lips from having direct contact with hot glass. If not shared, mouthpieces can reduce the risk of transmitting bacterial infections and blood borne viruses.

Mouthpieces are made from food-grade vinyl tubing. The bowl pipe and the straight stem are slightly different in size. Because of this, there are two sizes of mouthpiece tubing to ensure a secure fit.

**A minimum length of 1.5 inches is recommended, but can be cut to preferred size.**

**Mouthpieces are single use.**

Mouthpieces are for personal use only. They should never be shared. Saliva, phlegm or blood can remain on the mouthpiece. Infection can be transmitted by sharing mouthpieces.



Provide mouthpieces both in pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of mouthpieces per person, per visit.



## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before touching harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK Wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### USE NEW

Use a new mouthpiece every time when smoking/vaping drugs.

### Longer Mouthpiece = LESS RISKS

The longer the mouthpiece, the less chance debris will reach the mouth and burn the throat. A minimum length of 1.5 inches is recommended, but some might prefer a longer mouthpiece.

### NEVER SHARE

Using a personal mouthpiece every time prevents transmission of HIV and hepatitis B and C.

### ENCOURAGE Mouthpieces

A mouthpiece that is not shared will protect the mouth from:

- Burns from a hot pipe or stem
- Oral lesions (sores in the mouth)
- Infection
- Blood borne viruses

### CAREFUL Removal

To prevent burns to the hands remove the mouthpiece carefully from a hot stem.

### DISPOSAL

Used mouthpieces should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



#### Try this line:

**“Hey, you want a bowl pipe or straight stem? Don’t forget the mouthpiece – it goes with it.”**

# PUSH STICKS

Push sticks are used to pack and position screens inside the straight stem. They can also be used to scrape out the resin that remains in the stem after smoking/vaping.

Push sticks are birch wood dowels that will not scratch, chip glass, or lead to stem breakage.

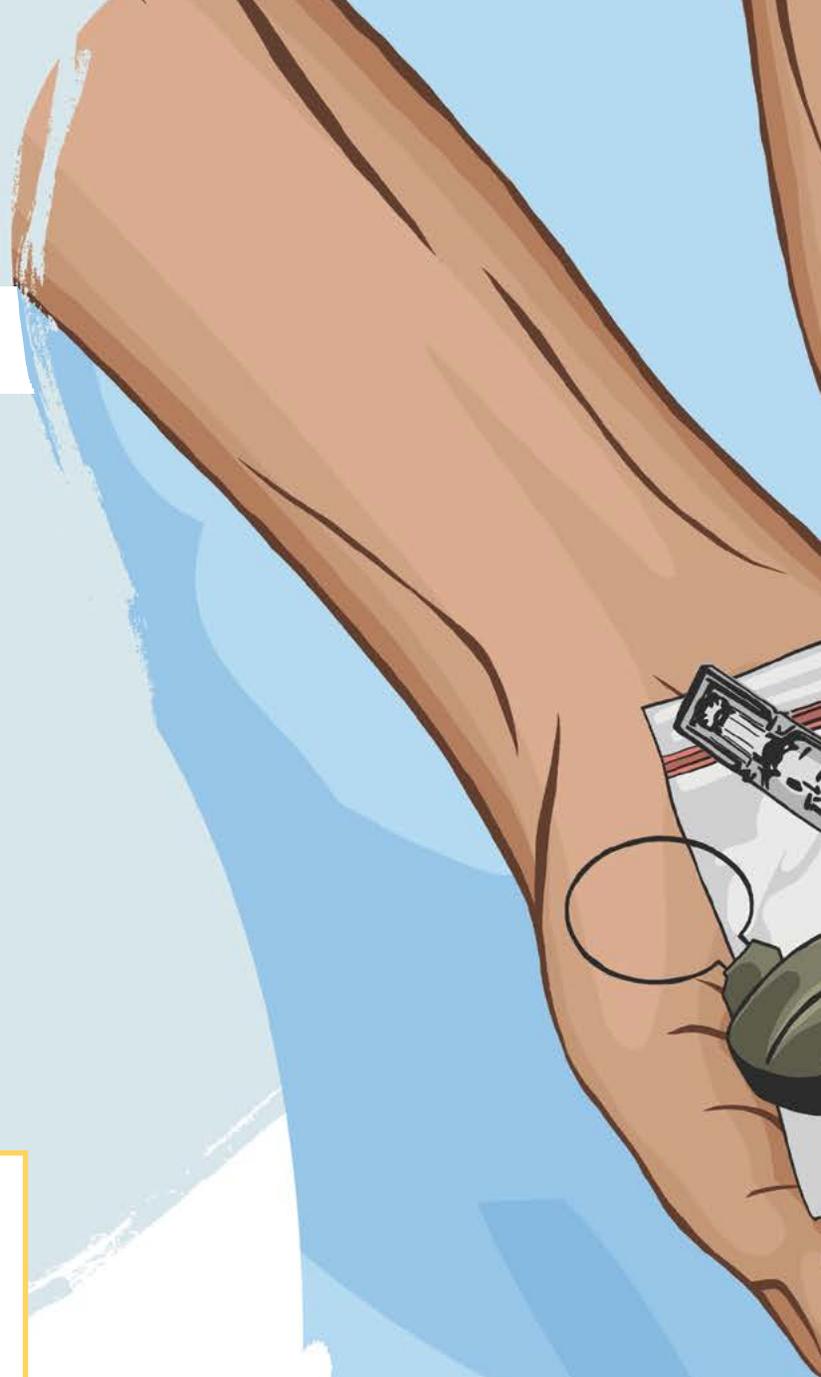


Provide push sticks both in pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of push sticks per person, per visit.



## Try this line:

**"It's safer to use a wooden push stick to pack the screens. A plastic syringe plunger can melt inside the hot pipe. A metal object can scratch or damage the glass."**



## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

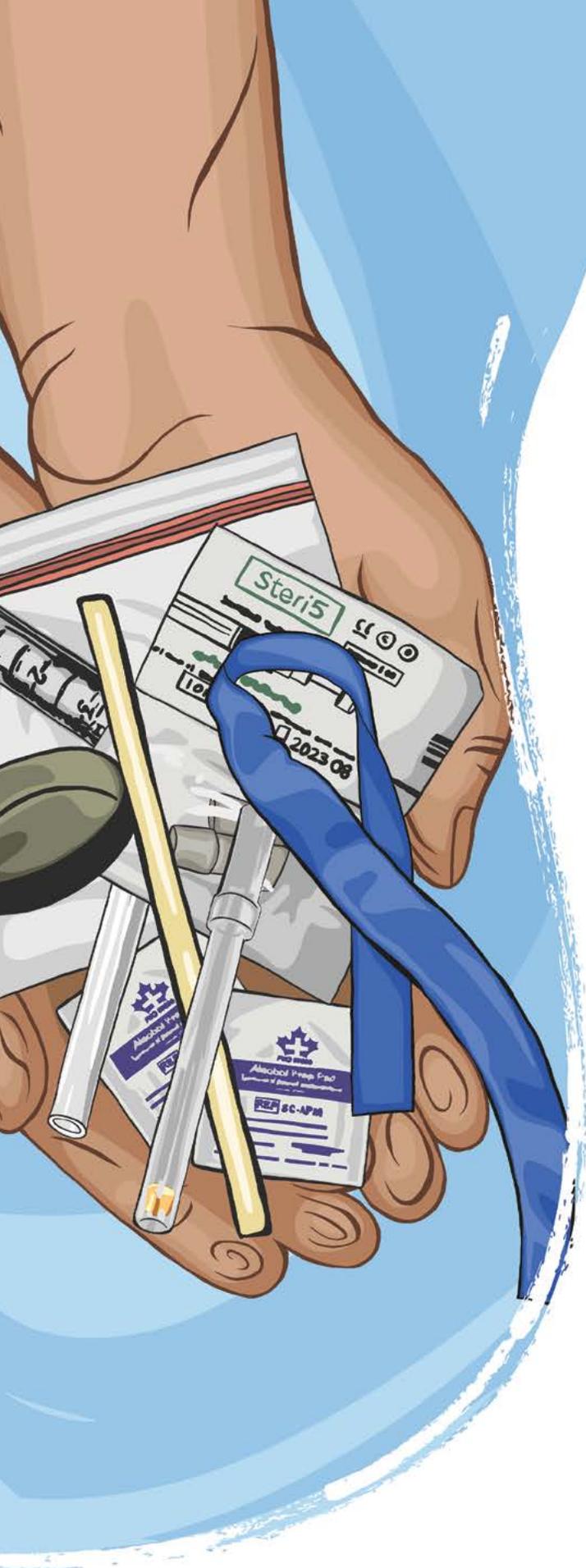
Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK Wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### AVOID Makeshift Sticks

Self-made or makeshift push sticks may scratch or introduce bacteria into the stem. Using a metal object as a push stick can impair the integrity of the glass leading to chipping, cracking, or breaking.

### DISPOSAL

Used push sticks should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



### Try this line:

**“Hey, if you use these wooden push sticks instead of something else, the pipe will definitely last longer.”**

# STRAWS

Paper straws are used for snorting powdered drugs or inhaling vapour from heating drugs on foil. The paper straws are for personal use only. They are made from biodegradable material.

Snorting drugs can damage the membranes in the nose. This can cause it to bleed easily. Inserting the straws in the nasal cavity to snort powdered drugs can contaminate them with blood droplets.

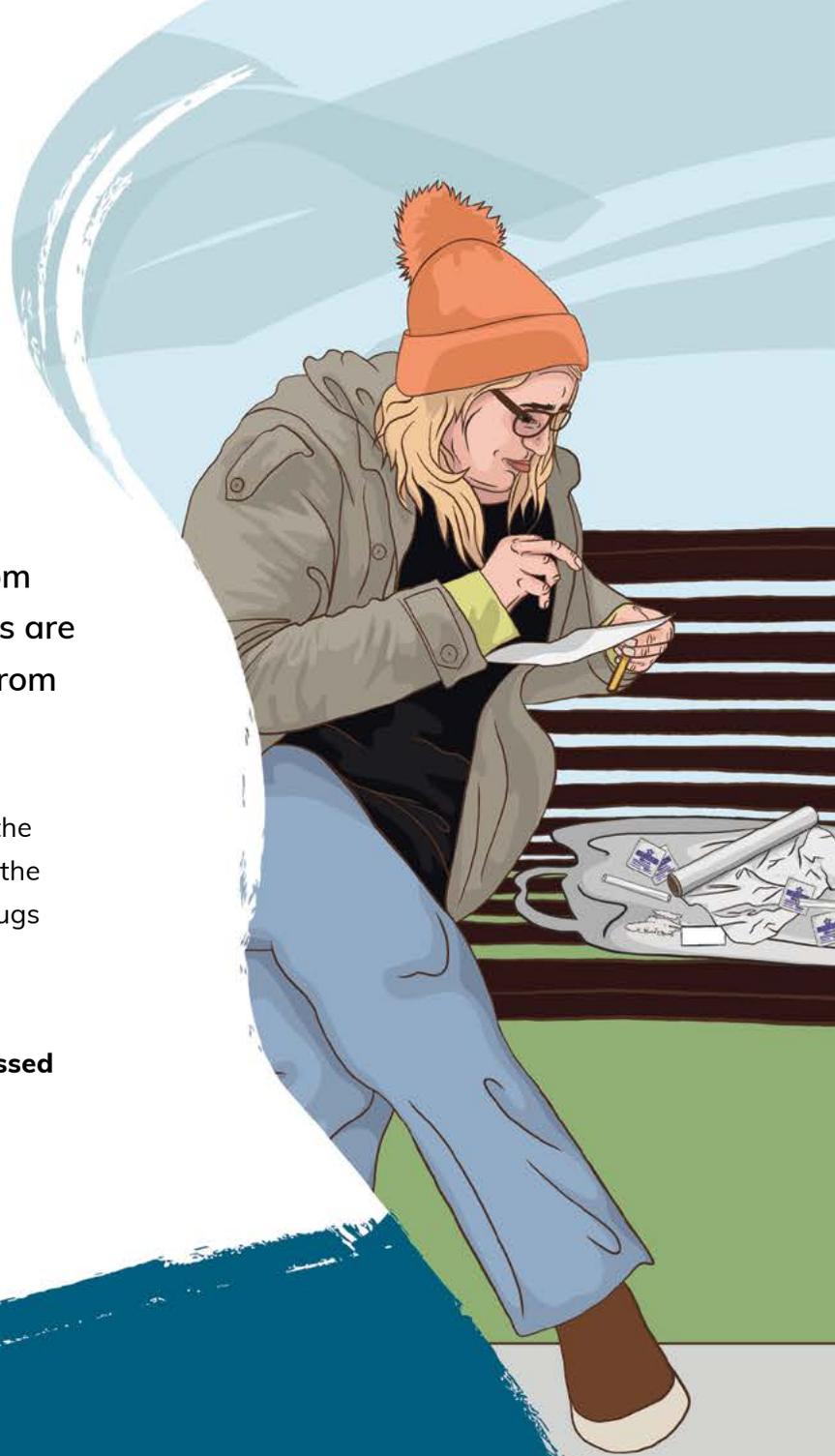
**Straws should never be shared. They may transmit bacteria and viruses that can be passed on to others if shared.**

Makeshift items or plastic straws can cause scratches and tears to the inside of the nose. Using paper straws helps to reduce harms.

People with fine motor impairment might find using straws easier than rolling a foil tube.



Provide paper straws both in pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of paper straws per person, per visit.



## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before touching harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK Wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug preparation surface.

### NEVER SHARE

Always use your own straw to lessen the risk of infection. It will also decrease the chance of spreading infection from bacteria and germs from hands.

### SINGLE Use

Paper straws are single use.

### OVERDOSE

Overdose is possible from inhaling drugs. Never use alone. Always have a naloxone kit when using opioid drugs.

### Keep STRAWS DRY

Paper straws will deteriorate with moisture or humidity. Keep them dry.

### DISPOSAL

Used paper straws should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



### Try this line:

**“You know that straws aren’t for snorting only. If you smoke drugs, you can use them to vape as well.”**

# FOIL

Foil sheets are used to smoke/vape drugs that produce inhalable vapours when heated. Smoking drugs this way is called “chasing the dragon.” Many drugs can be consumed by using foil, such as: crack cocaine, crystal meth, brown heroin and pills like oxycodone and fentanyl. Drugs in pill form such as prescription opiates are crushed into a powder before smoking.

Foil is used by people who prefer smoking/vaping drugs. Some use foil when wanting to take a break from injecting to give veins a chance to heal. Some people switch to foil when they want to transition away from injecting to inhalation.

### Switching from injecting to smoking drugs may have benefits:

- reduces risk of transmission of blood borne viruses
- lessens vein injuries
- no missed or wasted hits
- reduces abscesses
- no needle marks

### Smoking drugs from foil can prevent harms associated with injecting. It still carries risks. Smoking drugs can cause:

- heat damage to the throat and lungs from hot vapours
- asthma-like breathing difficulties from smoking drugs and impurities



Foil for smoking drugs is stronger and thicker than general household foil. It is not coated with oil and not texturized.

Foil sheets can be cut into multiple pieces as preferred or folded for a thicker surface.

Provide the foil in both pre-packaged kits and as individual items. There should be no limit on the number of foil sheets per person, per visit.

## KEY MESSAGES

### WASH Hands

Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies or drugs. If soap and water are not available, use BZK wipes or alcohol swabs. Use a new BZK wipe or alcohol swab to clean the drug prep surface.

### Keep it CLEAN

A new, clean piece of foil can be used as a safer preparation surface.

### AVOID Sharing

Each foil sheet is single use only.

### Give Veins a BREAK

Switching from injecting to smoking can give veins a break to heal. It helps reduce the risk of infections and abscesses.

### Make a FOIL PIPE

Make your own pipe using foil. Foil pipes are safer than makeshift devices and can reduce the chance of cutting lips.

### NO OIL COATING

This foil was made for smoking drugs. It has no oil coating, so no need to burn it before using.

### Beware of OVERDOSE

Drug overdose is possible when smoking/vaping drugs.

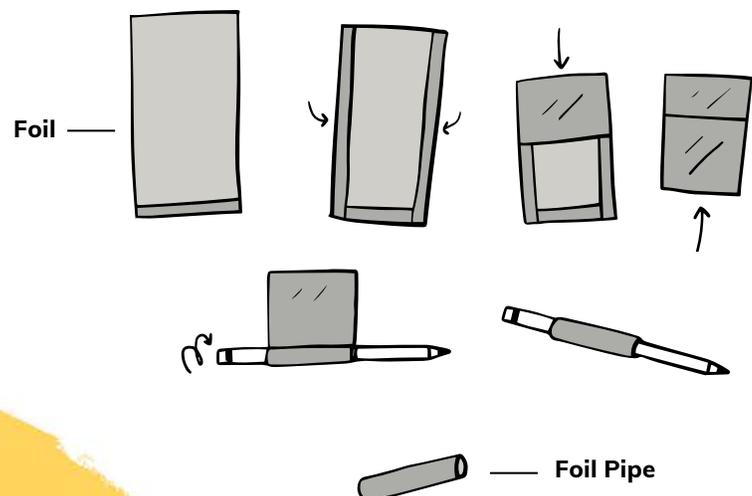
#### It is important to:

- not use alone
- recognize the signs of an overdose
- respond if an overdose occurs

### DISPOSAL

Used foil should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.

## FOIL FOLDING TECHNIQUE



### Try this line

“Did you know you can make your own pipe out of foil?”

# SMOKING CRACK COCAINE

## USING A STRAIGHT STEM

Crack is made by mixing powdered cocaine with water and another substance, usually baking soda (sodium bicarbonate).

Solid crystals form after boiling the mixture. These crystals are known as crack or freebase cocaine. The rocks are white, cream or light brown colour.

Crack cocaine is in a crystal form. It needs to be heated to produce vapours that are inhaled. It has a low melting point producing crackling sounds when heated. Cocaine powder has a high melting point and makes no sound.

Crack is a smokable and stronger form of cocaine. It causes a greater high with more intense side effects during use and in the 'comedown' or 'crash' phase.

Crack is commonly smoked using a straight stem or from foil. Screens are needed for smoking crack from a straight stem. The screens keep the drug in place and also keeps hot pieces from being inhaled into the mouth.

Crack is usually smoked, but can be injected, snorted or swallowed.

After smoking crack, some of the drug resin will remain on the walls of the stem. You can see the resin better when the stem cools down. Crack resin can be collected by pushing a screen to the opposite side of the stem or by moving it back and forth to scrape the built up resin from the wall of the stem. The screen can be pushed out of the stem and turned round before being reinserted. Screens can shrink after being heated. Add more screens if needed for a snug fit in the stem.



## KEY MESSAGES

### Types of GLASS

Tempered glass (Pyrex) is safer than untempered glass which can shatter and break when heated. This can cause injuries to the lips and mouth.

### Use Proper EQUIPMENT

Using makeshift smoking equipment, such as plastic bottles or cans should be avoided. The hot, jagged surface of these items can cause burns, blisters, cuts and sores. Heating or burning them can release toxic fumes that are inhaled.

### Use BRASS SCREEN

Always use brass screens. Brillo® or other steel scouring pads should not be used. These alternatives are unsafe due to chemicals on them that will be heated and inhaled. They can also cause injuries and burns to the lips and inner mouth.

For those who prefer using Brillo®, a safer method is to place a brass screen over the mouth end of the pipe. Fit a mouthpiece over the top to keep it snug and in place. This will keep pieces of Brillo® and hot drug pieces from being inhaled into the mouth. Another option is to wrap a brass screen around the Brillo® and use them together.

### Using a STRAIGHT STEM

After taking a hit, the straight stem should be put on a non-melting surface with the screen end tilted slightly upwards.

Straight stems can get very hot during heating. Let the stem cool down before taking the next hit to prevent burns to lips, mouth and hands.

### Use PUSH STICKS

Use wooden push sticks instead of metal or needles/syringes to position the screens or scrape the resin. These makeshift devices can chip the stem or cause it to break.

### AVOID Sharing

Never share a personal straight stem. Even small amounts of blood from cuts or burns on the lips can remain on the stem. The blood residue can transmit infections such as hepatitis C.

### REUSING Screens

If you are reusing screens, add more so that the fit is snug in the stem.

### ALWAYS Use a Mouthpiece

If people are sharing their stem with others, remind them to always use their own mouthpiece.

A personal mouthpiece can protect lips from burns and cuts.

### ALWAYS Clean

If reusing your own straight stem, bowl pipe or mouthpiece, always clean with an alcohol swab. This does not make it safe for sharing.

### FENTANYL

Remind individuals that sometimes fentanyl or fentanyl-analogs (similar drugs) are found in crack cocaine. There is no way to tell by colour, taste or smell if the crack cocaine batch contains fentanyl.

### Carry NALOXONE

Encourage everyone to carry a naloxone kit. It is used to reverse opioid overdose only. It has no effect on overdoses caused by other drugs.

### AVOID Using Alone

Overdose is possible when smoking drugs. Learn to recognize the signs of an overdose. Don't use alone.

# SMOKING DRUGS

## USING FOIL

Smoking drugs using foil is also known as 'Chasing the Dragon'. Many drugs can be used this way such as: brown/black tar heroin, crack cocaine, crystal meth, fentanyl and some pills. Drugs in tablet form are often crushed into a powder first before putting them on foil.

Exposing lungs and mouth to any kind of smoke or heated vapour can be harmful. Providing foil may prevent or divert people from injecting.

Foil may help reduce the risks associated with injecting, such as:

- transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and C
- bacterial or fungal infections
- vein damage

### A Method of Using Foil for CHASING THE DRAGON

- 1** Cut or fold the foil to preferred length.
- 2** Place the drug on the foil.
- 3** Heat the bottom of the foil with a lighter (do not touch the foil as it will burn holes).
- 4** The drug will start producing vapour.
- 5** Inhale the vapour using a straw or foil pipe.



## USING FOIL TO SMOKE CRACK COCAINE

### A Method of Using Foil to SMOKE CRACK COCAINE

- 1 Always wash hands before handling harm reduction supplies. Use soap and water, BZK Wipe or alcohol swab to clean hands and preparation area.
- 2 Fold foil in half to provide strength or cut to desired length.
- 3 Place rocks in the middle of the foil while holding the foil between thumb and pointer finger.
- 4 Apply heat from below foil using a lighter. Take care not to touch the foil with the flame. It could burn holes in the foil, and evaporate the drug too quickly.
- 5 Tilt the foil so the liquid runs or slides when the rocks melt to a liquid form.
- 6 Pinch the edges of the foil to prevent liquid crack from spilling over. Crack can slide fast on the foil surface when it becomes liquid.
- 7 The straw or foil pipe is used to follow the vapours as crack slides up and down the foil.
- 8 When using a foil pipe, drug residue will remain on the inside wall of the pipe. Open the foil pipe to use as the next surface using the residue. Make a new foil pipe out of a new piece of foil.



# SMOKING

# CRYSTAL METH

## USING A BOWL PIPE

Bowl Pipes are used primarily for smoking crystal meth. When smoked, crystal meth is absorbed in the bloodstream through the lungs. The effects are usually felt within 2 minutes.

**Using safer smoking supplies from harm reduction programs can decrease the amount of cuts, burns, blisters and sores inside the mouth and on the lips.** These occur more when using makeshift equipment that can increase risk of HIV and hepatitis C transmission. Blood to blood contact can occur when these items are shared.

### A method for

### SMOKING CRYSTAL METH

- 1** Always clean hands before handling harm reduction supplies. Use soap and water, BZK Wipes or alcohol swabs.
- 2** Attach the mouthpiece to the end of the pipe.
- 3** Add crystal meth into the bowl pipe.
- 4** Tap the pipe gently to settle the rocks in the bowl.
- 5** Hold the pipe halfway down the stem and apply heat (lighter) slowly to the bowl.
- 6** Lighter is slowly moved back and forth to distribute the heat evenly.
- 7** Rocks slowly change to liquid creating a vapour.
- 8** Inhale the vapour slowly and exhale immediately. Do not hold the vapour in the lungs. This can burn your lungs and will not give you a better high.

## KEY MESSAGES

### INHALE and EXHALE

Inhale slowly and exhale immediately to prevent burning the lungs. Holding the smoke in the lungs can be very damaging. It makes no difference to the intensity of the drug effect.

### ALWAYS Use a Mouthpiece

Always use a mouthpiece to avoid burning lips and mouth.

### AVOID Sharing

A bowl pipe is for personal use only. Never share. Blood particles with the hepatitis C virus can be passed on from cracked lips.

### Prevent SIDE EFFECTS

Smoking crystal meth can damage lungs and dry out the mouth and lips. Using lip balm after smoking can help prevent lip sores.

### SINGLE Use

All harm reduction supplies are single use. If pipes are being used again, be sure to clean well first with an alcohol swab.

### Use Proper EQUIPMENT

Using makeshift equipment can cause cuts, burns, blisters and open sores on the mouth, lips and gums.

### Encourage EATING

Encourage people who smoke crystal meth to take vitamins and eat something before they smoke. Crystal meth is an appetite suppressant and most people will not feel hunger after smoking. When coming down, eating will help with sleep.

### Stay PROTECTED

Crystal meth is associated with more risky sex. Encourage people to carry condoms to avoid having unprotected sex while being high.

### AVOID Using Alone

If possible, smoke in a safe place with trusted people.

### OVERDOSE Risk

Overdose from smoking crystal meth is possible. Individuals should know how to recognize signs of overdose and how to respond.

### DISPOSAL

Used safer smoking supplies should be disposed of safely. Please see [pages 90-91](#) for information on safe disposal.



# USING FOIL TO SMOKE FENTANYL

Smoking is a common way of using fentanyl. Fentanyl comes in many forms: rock, pills, powder, and transdermal patches. Fentanyl can be mixed with drugs such as heroin, crystal meth, or cocaine. The high from injecting or smoking fentanyl is felt almost instantly. Depending on the form, different methods may be needed to prepare it for smoking.

## Some common methods of smoking fentanyl include:

- Pills: crush the pills into a powder and heat the fentanyl on foil. Inhale the vapours.
- Powder: heat the fentanyl powder on foil. Inhale the vapours.
- Rock: break some of the chalky pieces off and heat it on foil. Inhale the vapours.
- Patch: stick the patch on the foil and heat it to transfer fentanyl to the foil. Remove the patch, heat the residue and inhale the vapours.

## KEY MESSAGES

### CUTTING

Fentanyl in powder form comes in different colours. These variations in colour typically comes from substances used to dilute it, also known as “cutting.” This form is incredibly dangerous because there is no way to determine its true potency.

### Uncertain DOSE

Cutting fentanyl patches and smoking smaller pieces can lead to very uncertain and fast release of fentanyl. Fast release of fentanyl leads to fast increase in fentanyl levels in the blood. It makes it hard to control the dose and can cause an overdose if the dose is too high.

### Fentanyl acts FAST

Using slowly allows time for the body to adjust. This can prevent taking too much at once.

### RE-DOSING

The initial very intense high is typically followed by a more lucid feeling. That doesn't mean the fentanyl has left the system. “Re-dosing” right away could lead to an overdose.

### OVERDOSE Risk

Fentanyl and its analogues are much stronger than any other opioid. Because of its almost instant effect when smoked, margin for error is low. Very small doses can lead to an overdose.

### Recognize SIGNS of Overdose

Learn how to recognize and respond to an overdose.

### Carry NALOXONE

Encourage everyone to carry a naloxone kit. It is used to reverse opioid overdose only. It has no effect on overdoses caused by other drugs.

### AVOID Using Alone

Remind people to avoid using alone and always have naloxone on hand. If possible, suggest they have a plan for a friend to check in on them.

### A Method of Using Foil to SMOKE FENTANYL

- 1 Cut or fold the foil to preferred length.
- 2 Place the fentanyl (powder, rock or patch) on the foil.
- 3 Heat the bottom of the foil with a lighter (do not touch the foil as it will burn holes).
- 4 Fentanyl will start producing vapour.
- 5 Inhale the vapour using a straw or foil pipe.

# SWALLOWING & SNORTING



# SWALLOWING OR INGESTING DRUGS

Swallowing drugs causes the slowest onset of drug effects. The high will be felt often around 20-30 minutes after swallowing. Swallowing has the least intense effects of all methods of taking drugs.

The advantage of swallowing is that the effects last longer and the comedown is easier. Drugs are often swallowed in the form of pills or dissolved in liquid. They can also be wrapped in a small piece of tissue or smoking paper and swallowed (“parachuting”).

## KEY MESSAGES

### Know the RISKS

Swallowing drugs has the fewest risks of all the methods of taking drugs. But it still has risks.

- Ingesting (swallowing/eating) can lead to overdose depending on amount of drug and personal tolerance.
- Rubbing some drugs like meth into the tongue or gums can lead to mouth ulcers.
- Swallowing drugs can be hard on the stomach for people who have ulcers or other digestive problems.

### Control the DOSE

Knowing the amount of drug is important to avoid health risks. Since it takes longer to feel the drug effect, don't take too much at first. Also don't re-dose too quickly as it could lead to overdose.

The drugs can be weaker or stronger than expected. Sometimes it can even be a different substance. Allowing time to feel the effects will help you determine the right amount to take.

### Minimizing SIDE EFFECTS

Eating something before swallowing drugs will help reduce stomach problems.

### PREPARE Your Own

Always prepare your own drugs for safety.

# SNORTING DRUGS

Snorting drugs means inhaling through the nose. Drugs are absorbed into the bloodstream through the nasal membrane. When snorting drugs the effects may take longer to feel than injecting. It may take 5 to 10 minutes after snorting to feel the effect, which may be less intense but last longer.

Drugs like cocaine, amphetamines and heroin that can be easily dissolved with water can be absorbed through the nasal membrane. After snorting, the drugs are deposited on the mucous membrane and are absorbed into the bloodstream.

Snorting is a common method for consuming cocaine. A straw, sometimes called an inhaler, a bullet, or bumper can be used to snort drugs. Dissolving the drug in water and squirting it up the nose with a syringe is called 'waterlining'.

Snorting drugs can cause small blood vessels in the nose to become irritated and rupture. Small amounts of blood can leak out and transfer to the snorting device. Frequent snorting increases the amount of irritation of the inner lining of the nose. Long term and frequent snorting can lead to nosebleeds and destroying of the nasal septum. This increases the risk of HIV and hepatitis C transmission.

Some cutting agents in drugs can contribute to nasal damage and bleeding. They can create small cuts and tears in the inner lining of the nose. This can lead to frequent and microscopic bleeding.

**Sharing snorting devices increases the risk of HIV and hepatitis C transmission.**

## KEY MESSAGES

### Personal and SINGLE USE

Equipment for snorting is for personal and single use only.

### Risk to Your NOSE

Snorting drugs can cause bleeding from small vessels in the nose. Infections and blood borne viruses can be passed if sharing equipment.

### Reduce DAMAGE

Switch nostrils to reduce damage to blood vessels and nasal cartilage. Snorting can cause:

- very bad nosebleeds
- excessive mucous production
- a destroyed septum
- easier transmission of blood borne viruses due to nasal damage

### Less Damage, More ABSORPTION

Chopping or crushing pills, rocks or granules to a fine powder can reduce the damage caused by snorting. It will cause less damage in the nose and improve drug absorption. Improved absorption can increase the high with less amount of drug being snorted. Big granules are not absorbed easily in the nose and can cause damage.

### Avoiding Nostril IRRITATION

If the nostrils become irritated from snorting, try switching to swallowing until the nasal passage or nose heals.

### Use COLOURED STRAWS

Use different coloured straws to identify your personal snorting supply. If you don't have different coloured straws, mark your device to avoid getting it mixed up.

### Avoiding GERMS

Avoid using paper money or 'bumping' off keys for snorting. These items are covered in germs and bacteria that can cause sinus infection. Single use paper straws, a foil tube, or pyrex stems are safer options.

### RINSE After Use

Rinse the nose with lukewarm water after snorting. It can reduce the risk of nasal damage. Snorting a few drops of water after using can dissolve any left over drugs in the nose. The water can carry the drug into the throat causing less waste.

### Best Way to SNORT

Insert the straw high up into the nasal passage when snorting. This will reduce the amount of drug that gets trapped in nose hairs. It can also reduce nasal irritation.

# OPIOID OVERDOSE

OPIOID DRUGS depress the central nervous system. They cause breathing to slow down or even stop in the case of overdose. Any opioid can cause an overdose.

## Signs of opioid overdose:

- Small contracted pupils
- Drowsiness
- Slow breathing, difficulty breathing (sounds like choking or gurgling)
- The person might 'nod off' but may still respond to a light shake or loud noise
- Fingernails or lips turn blue
- Limp muscles
- Slurred speech



### Try this line:

**"Hey, I notice you are using opiates?  
Do you need a naloxone kit?"**

Opioid overdose is a medical emergency. If the person is unresponsive, call or have someone CALL 911.

When calling 911 for emergency help, neither the intoxicated individual or the person calling can be charged with possession of controlled substances, whether or not they have also used drugs.



## IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER

- Start low and go slow. Heroin and any other opioid pills can be laced with fentanyl or its analogues. Even very small amounts of fentanyl can cause an overdose.
- Tolerance to opioids can change even after a short period of not using drugs. Sometimes after only a few days. The drop in tolerance makes the regular dose much stronger and more dangerous. People often overdose after time spent in rehab, detox, prison, or the hospital.
- Tolerance to opioids can build quickly. This means more drugs are needed to have the same effect. Tolerance can develop to many of the drug's effects – except for the effect on breathing. Risk of opioid overdose always exists – no matter how experienced a person is.
- Overdose can happen from injecting, smoking, snorting or swallowing opioids.
- Mixing drugs increases risk of overdose.
- Injecting drugs in a familiar place where people are comfortable and don't have to rush can reduce the risk of overdose.
- Doing too much at once, or too much over a short period of time will increase risk of overdose.



### Try this line:

**“You mentioned you just got out of jail (hospital, detox). Do you need naloxone?”**

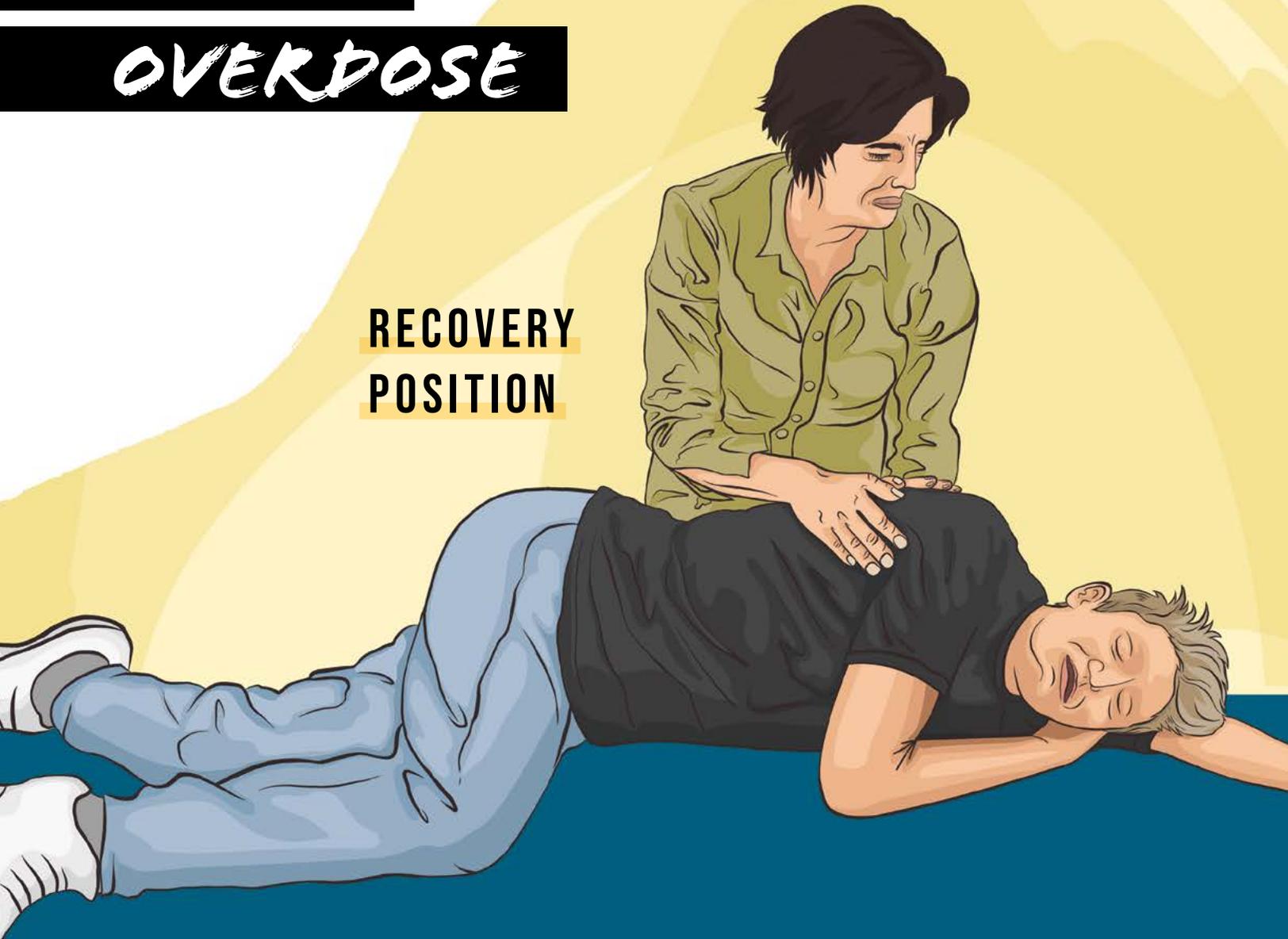
**IF SOMEONE IS HAVING  
AN OPIOID OVERDOSE**

See next page

## IF SOMEONE IS HAVING AN

# OPIOD OVERDOSE

### RECOVERY POSITION



- Try to wake them by calling their name or speaking to them loudly.
- If unresponsive, try shoulder squeezes or pushing a pen against the person's fingernail. If no reaction they might be unconscious. Don't slap or be forceful.
- If the person responds, try to have a simple conversation with them.
- Monitor their breathing and responsiveness.
- Try keeping the person awake.

## HOW TO RESPOND

- **CALL 911** (or get someone else to call) as soon as signs of overdose are evident. Signs include:
  - Not breathing or has very slow and shallow breathing
  - Totally unresponsive
  - Worsening in their condition
- **Keep them safe until emergency care arrives.** If that is not possible, leave their door open with a note saying what drug the person used. This will help paramedics.
- **If you have to leave the person before paramedics arrive, put them in the recovery position.** This will make sure they don't choke if they start vomiting. It will keep their airway clear.
- **Learn how to put a person in the recovery position, it can save their life. Try to keep them awake.**
  1. Position the person on their side
  2. Their body should be supported by a bent knee
  3. Their face is turned to the side
  4. Tilt their head backwards and ensure airway is clear
  5. Place arm at side and other arm across chest with hand against cheek
- **If the person is not breathing start rescue breathing right away.**
- **Make sure the person having an overdose is seen by trained medical professionals.**
- **Naloxone can reverse the opioid overdose but the person may have other medical conditions that need to be attended to.** People who survive an overdose are at risk of other complications like pneumonia and heart issues.
- **Naloxone can only reverse an overdose caused by opioids. It will not reverse an overdose caused by other drugs. It is a temporary reversal of opioid overdose. If opioids are still in the system after naloxone effects wear off (20-90 minutes), the overdose can return.**
- **Do not inject the person with any substance other than naloxone to try to reverse the overdose.** Naloxone is the only safe and appropriate treatment for an opioid overdose.
- **Never put the person in a cold bath or shower.** This increases risk of falling, drowning, or going into shock.

# STIMULANT OVERDOSE

Cocaine/crack, crystal meth and other amphetamines are all STIMULANT DRUGS. Overdose from stimulants happens from taking too much drug or a combination of drugs. The following signs and symptoms could be present with an overdose from stimulant drugs:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Passing out
- High body temperature
- Intense sweating
- Racing heartbeat
- Chest pain
- Intense headache
- Seizures
- Muscle cramps
- Shortness of breath or irregular breathing
- Stroke

**The faster someone receives medical assistance the greater chance of recovery. Emergency response and medical treatment will depend on:**

- The type of drug
- The type of symptoms they are having and how bad they are

**If the person is dozing off or feeling sleepy right after using a stimulant it could be a sign of drug contamination with fentanyl or other opioids. Watch for signs that could mean opioid overdose. Opioid overdose requires naloxone.**

**Risk of overdose increases when people:**

- Don't know how much of the drug they are taking
- Use a drug contaminated with other substances like fentanyl or benzodiazepines
- Combine several types of stimulant drugs at the same time
- Use other substances like alcohol and/or benzodiazepines
- Use faster methods of consuming drugs like injecting

## IF SOMEONE IS HAVING A STIMULANT OVERDOSE

- **With a stimulant overdose it is important to make sure the person is:**
  - Still breathing
  - The heart is beating
- **CALL 911 (or get someone else to call) as soon as signs of overdose are evident.**
- **Signs include:**
  - Seizures
  - Drooling or frothing from the mouth
  - Limb spasms or rigidity
  - Signs of a heart attack, tightening or pain in the chest
  - Not breathing or shallow breathing
  - Signs of a stroke
    - Unable to talk clearly
    - Unable to understand what other people are saying
    - Losing feeling in the face, arms or legs (usually on one side of the body)
- **Try to get the person to slow down and relax.** If they can walk, move them to a quiet space.
- **Keep calm.** Your energy can affect others.
- **Try to keep them awake.**
- **Cool them down with a damp washcloth on their forehead.**
- **If the person is having a seizure, remove any sharp or dangerous items from around them.**
- **Keep them safe until emergency care arrives.** If not possible, leave the door open with a note of what drug the person used. This will ensure paramedics can enter easily and quickly.
- **Do not put the person in a cold shower.**
- **Do not give other substances or home remedies.** It could make things worse.
- **Do not restrain the person in any way or put anything in their mouth.** If the person is unconscious, place them in the recovery position ([see pages 84-85](#)).

# DISPOSAL OF USED HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES

Harm reduction supplies used in the preparation and use of drugs are considered biomedical waste if they come in contact with blood.

## Used sharps are biomedical waste because:

- They may have blood on them, which can transmit infections
- They can cause injury

HIV, hepatitis B and C are blood borne infections. Even if the amount of blood is so small it can't be seen, virus and bacteria can be shared through used supplies including sharps. Used harm reduction supplies may:

- Contain fluid or semi-fluid blood
- Release blood, when squeezed or pressed
- Be covered with dry blood spots

## The amount of time a virus can live outside the body can vary:

- HIV dies in open-air very quickly – within a few moments
- Hepatitis B can live outside the body for 7 days
- Hepatitis C can live outside the body for up to 3 weeks



## Try this line:

**“You can injure yourself if you try to break the tip off. Just cap the needle and place it in the sharps container as it is.”**



## WAYS HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES CAN COME IN CONTACT WITH BLOOD

### Needles

- Through injection
- When touching water, cooker or filters that have been used for preparation or injection

### Syringe Barrels

- Through contact with blood when flagging
- Splitting drugs with a used syringe
- If drawing blood in the syringe to rinse out residual (unused/leftover) drugs (flushing)

### Straight Stems Bowl Pipes Mouthpieces

- From cuts or burns on lips and mouth

### Alcohol Swabs Dry Swabs BZK Wipes

- If used for cleaning the injection site, or stopping blood flow after injecting
- By cleaning the drug preparation area that may contain blood spots

### Tourniquets

- When in contact with other used harm reduction supplies
- Accidental blood spatter/spurt during the injection process



### Try this line:

“If you don’t know where you can get rid of your sharps container, check out the online search engine map on [www.ohrdp.ca](http://www.ohrdp.ca).”

# DISPOSAL OF USED HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES

Best practice recommendations for safe disposal of used harm reduction supplies:

- Provide sharps containers for personal use
- Inform people where community disposal bins are located
- Provide disposal education to people who use drugs
- Give disposal education to the community
- Accept used needles for disposal
- Offer multiple ways to dispose of supplies (including outdoor community disposal boxes)

Safe disposal of used HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES is important to protect the community and people who use drugs from:

- Needle stick injuries.
- Injuries from sharp pieces of damaged supplies (e.g. broken or chipped straight stems and bowl pipes, sharp edges from folded cookers).
- Used supplies that could transmit HIV, hepatitis B and C.

Disposal of used injecting and inhalation supplies should be in line with local laws for biomedical waste.



Touching **INJECTING SUPPLIES** used by someone else is risky. Here are some safety tips for needle disposal:

- Dispose of needles in a puncture resistant sharps container.
- Put needles and syringes needle-end down in the container.
- Re-cap **ONLY** your own syringe after use before discarding.
- Don't try to remove, bend or break needles used by yourself or someone else.
- If there is no sharps container, put syringe inside a pop bottle or other capped hard plastic container that can be sealed. Loose syringes in garbage bags can injure other people.
- Never flush a used syringe down the toilet. They can clog pipes and injure the individuals who will need to remove them.

Touching **INHALING SUPPLIES** used by someone else is risky. Here are some safety tips for disposal:

- Dispose of straight stems and bowl pipes in a puncture resistant sharps container.
- Do not smash or break pipes before disposing of them. Small glass pieces with blood on them can end up on a sidewalk, playground, floor or table. They can injure others.
- If there is no sharps container available, put used straight stems or bowl pipes in a pop bottle or other capped container that can be sealed. Loose straight stems or bowl pipes in garbage bags can injure people.
- Never flush used supplies down the toilet. They can clog pipes and injure the individuals who will need to remove them.



**Try this line:**

**“Hey, thanks for bringing in all those used supplies, it’s really appreciated. I notice you have them in an old pop bottle, we have sharps containers for folks to use and they come in various sizes. Would you like one? It may be easier than trying to find a pop bottle?”**

# WHY HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES CAN CHANGE

Harm reduction supplies may sometimes change. This can include:

- 1 Design/style of the supply
- 2 Packaging
- 3 The material it's made from
- 4 Product name
- 5 Manufacturer or supplier

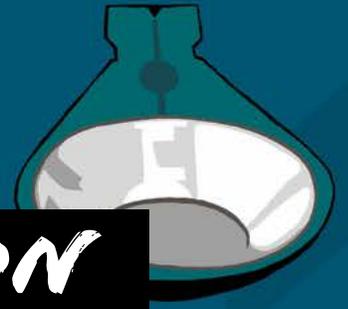
Promoting safer drug use practices includes providing education about harm reduction supplies.

Education about safer practices takes into account:

- Type and availability of harm reduction supplies
- Drugs used
- Personal situation
- Drug use habits and preferences

If unable to get the type of supplies they are used to, people may be more likely to start sharing or reusing. They may also try to modify or make their own equipment.

Change can be hard for anyone. It is always important to explain to individuals why the supply has changed. This way they can decide how it is similar to or better than the supply they had been using.





# RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH USING ALTERNATE ITEMS

## FOR INJECTING/SMOKING DRUGS

Drug use carries HEALTH RISKS. Proper use of harm reduction supplies can make people safer. Reasons people will use alternate supplies include:

- Personal drug-use habits and preferences
- Local drug use culture
- Lack of access to harm reduction supplies
- Easier access to alternate items
- Using drugs in new spaces (cars, alleys, public washrooms)

Alternate items are ALWAYS less safe than using supplies from a harm reduction program.

People may not be able to follow safer practices or use safer harm reduction supplies every time. Knowing the risks of using alternate supplies can help people stay closer to safer practices and reduce harms.

“You mentioned that you don’t like using brass screens and prefer Brillo® instead. If you still want to use Brillo®, here are some tips to minimize some of the risks.”



# RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH USING ALTERNATE ITEMS

## FOR INJECTING OR INHALING DRUGS

The table on the following page lists the most commonly used alternate supplies. They are also called household or makeshift items.

This is not a complete list. Your community members will be best able to reflect what happens in your own community. This is a discussion starter.



**Alternate items used  
for injecting drugs**



**Safer injecting supplies**



**Alternate items used for injecting drugs**

**Homemade cookers**

- Kitchen spoon
- Beer or pop bottle caps
- Bottom of pop, beer or juice cans

**Household acidifiers**

- Lemon juice
- Vinegar

(Acidifiers are used to make crack cocaine and brown/black tar heroin water soluble).

**Non-sterile water sources**

- Tap water
- Bottled water
- Boiled and cooled water from the kettle
- Toilet water
- Well water

**Risks associated with using alternate items used for injecting drugs**

- These items may have bacteria and other microbes, rust and dirt.
- Bacteria is not easily removed from household items.
- Proper disinfection takes many steps. Even the best procedure cannot guarantee all viruses have been killed.

- Lemon juice and vinegar may contain bacteria and fungi. This can cause health problems including heart infections and blindness.
- Injecting any type of acid into the bloodstream is damaging. Harsh acids like lemon juice or vinegar can cause pain, blood vessel irritation and local vein damage.

- Bottled water can have microbes and bacterial-static agents. Drinking it is okay but not injecting into veins.
- Saline is a salt solution, which is not safe for injecting in veins. It may also affect the drugs.
- Tap water will have chlorine and fluoride in it depending on where you live.
- Tap water going through your digestive system is very different from going through veins.
- Bacteria can be in water pipes, this includes well-water, lead pipes or rusted pipes.



**Safer injecting supplies**

**Sterile cookers**

✓ Always heat drugs to boil then cool before injecting to remove bacteria/mould/fungi.

**Pharmaceutical grade vitamin C**

✓ Adding more acidifier will not break down the coating from pills but will increase the acidity of the drug solution.

**Sterile water in ampoules**

✓ Water that has been used to rinse the syringe out should never be used for injecting.

**Advantages of using safer injecting supplies over alternate items**

- Sterile cookers are made from aluminum or stainless steel and do not rust.
- Cookers have been sterilized with other items in the cooker bag.
- Sterile cookers contain no bacteria or other contaminants when used right out of a sealed bag.
- Sterile cookers heat faster and more evenly than household spoons.
- Handles on the cookers are designed to protect fingers.
- Cookers are designed to hold 3ml of liquid.

- Vitamin C in 100mg packages have been sterilized for safety.
- Vitamin C comes in very small granules for easy dissolving when heated.
- Pharmaceutical grade vitamin C used in the smallest amount possible offers the least harm.
- Use vitamin C for crack cocaine and brown/black tar heroin.

- Sterile water for inhalation is safe to use for injection.
- Sterile water reduces the risk of developing bacterial infections like cellulitis and abscesses, septicemia (infection in the bloodstream), and endocarditis (infection of the heart valve).
- Sterile water is free of bacteria contamination.
- Water ampoules come in 3ml size.
- If not all water is used from an ampoule, the rest should be discarded.



### Alternate items used for injecting drugs

#### Homemade filter for injection

- Cigarette filter

#### Altered or retrofitted straight stems or bowl pipes

- Asthma inhaler
- Light bulbs
- Water bottles (for bongos)
- Pop cans
- GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate) vials

### Risks associated with using alternate items used for injecting drugs

- If using an already smoked cigarette filter, it will contain numerous toxins that can cause harms to the body.
- Cigarette filters are not sterile and may have been handled multiple times before using.
- Cigarette filters are made of glass wool/fibres and plastic. These items should not be injected into the bloodstream.

- Altering straight stems or bowl pipes using extreme heat to make them into another shape can make them very unstable.
- When a stem or pipe is made unstable it can explode or break. This can cause injury to face, eyes or hands.
- Asthma inhalers are made of plastic. When heated and used for inhalation, toxic chemicals from the plastic will be inhaled.
- Light bulbs are a delicate glass that can be unstable when used for inhalation purposes. This glass can easily break or explode causing injuries to hands, mouth or face.
- Water bottles are not made for heating and can emit toxic fumes when inhaled.



### Safer injecting supplies

#### Sterile filters

✓ Sterile filters are single use. Bacteria/mould/fungi can grow on used filters making them not safe to use again.

#### Straight stems and bowl pipes from harm reduction program

### Advantages of using safer injecting supplies over alternate items

- Packaged filters from harm reduction sites are sterile.
  - They come either in a pack of 5, or in a cooker package.
  - They can be dropped from the package into the cooker so there is no need to handle them.
  - Pore width of sterile filters is much smaller than cigarette filters. This means they are better able to filter larger particles out of the drug solution.
- Using the pyrex stems and pipes in the form they are provided by your harm reduction program is safest. They have been specially designed to withstand high heat and temperature changes.
  - Using a personal mouthpiece reduces chance of burning or cutting lips and mouth on stems and pipes.



**Alternate items used for injecting drugs**

**Homemade screens for straight stems**

- Brillo®
- Steel Wool
- Cigarette filters

**Risks associated with using alternate items used for injecting drugs**

- Homemade screens can produce toxic fumes. These fumes are inhaled into the lungs when the stem is heated. This can cause irritation and damage to the throat and lungs.
- Homemade screens can break apart when heated. The small pieces of hot metal can cause damage to the mouth, throat or lungs.
- Hot steel wool ingested can burn in the airway and along the route to the stomach.



**Safer injecting supplies**

**Packaged brass screens**

✓ For clients who prefer to use Brillo®, a safer method of using would be to wrap the Brillo® in a brass screen.

**OR**

✓ Mold a brass screen over the mouth end of the stem and place a mouthpiece over top to keep it secure. This way hot pieces or Brillo® will not be inhaled.

**Advantages of using safer injecting supplies over alternate items**

- Brass screens are made of thin brass metal.
- Brass screens are:
  - highly heat resistant
  - pliable
  - have no chemical coating

Brass screens, when prepared (folded) for use in a straight stem should fit tightly to prevent them or pieces of the drug from being inhaled.

**Makeshift push sticks**

- Syringe plungers
- Metal items like a car antenna

- Using a plastic syringe plunger in a hot pipe or stem may cause it to melt.
- Metal push sticks can have sharp edges that will scratch or chip the pipe or stem. Chipped pipes and stems break more easily, leading to possible injury or infection.

**Wooden push sticks**

- Wooden push sticks are used to position the screen(s) in the pipe and/or to remove drug residue. They will not scratch or chip the pyrex glass stem or pipe.

**Household foil or hairdressing foil**

- Household or hairdressing foil is thinner and can burn through easily.
- These foils contain an oil coating that is used in the manufacturing process. When heated the oil is burned and will be inhaled/ingested along with the drugs.
- Hairdressing foil can be texturized. Resin may collect in the textured grooves.

**Foil designed for drug use**

- Foil designed for drug use is thicker to create a more stable surface when heated.
- There is no oil used in the manufacturing process.

## USE OF HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES FOR

# NON-INTENDED PURPOSES

Harm reduction supplies are made to minimize the risks associated when using drugs. This can only happen if the equipment is used as intended. People will come up with creative ways to use the supplies to meet their specific needs. While this is very ingenious, it may not always be safe.

Individuals may feel hesitant sharing how they actually use the supplies. That is why it's important to build trust and let people know you would like to learn from them about ways of preparing and using drugs. Once relationships are created you can use your knowledge to offer suggestions to support safer practices and reduce risks.



### Try these lines:

"You mentioned that you use alcohol swabs after injection? Just want you to know, they can increase bleeding and keep blood from clotting. It's best to use the dry swab found in the Stericup or One-Use cooker packages, even a clean tissue will work."

"If you're doing washes, they can be risky. You can make a wash safer by heating your drugs to a boil before injecting. Just let it cool before you inject. By cooking the drug first you'll kill off bacteria/mould/yeast/fungi that could be on the drug or the equipment."

"So you sometimes sharpen your needles on a matchbox? You should know that the needle tips are very sensitive and can be damaged after one injection. Even if your eye can't see it, they barb after a single use. It's so small but can still cause you problems. Try to plan ahead and get enough needles so you can always use a new one with each injection."

"It's not a great idea to retrofit the stems. When you use a blow torch to change the design, it compromises the glass. Then, when you go to use your new pipe, it can actually blow-up in your face. This has happened before and is really dangerous".

# GATHERING FEEDBACK

## FROM CLIENTS ABOUT HARM REDUCTION SUPPLIES

Gathering client feedback is crucial to helping frontline staff know how supplies are being used in real life. Feedback may include information about client satisfaction/dissatisfaction around supplies.

When conversations about supplies happen, it's important to dig down for details:

- **What did the person like or not like about the supply?**
- **Did they like or not like the design of the supply:**
  - The shape or size
  - The material (type of metal, texture, fabric)
- **Does the feedback relate to a specific drug practice?**

This dialogue creates the opportunity to share better/safer practice tips. It also opens the door to explain any misinformation about a product or technique.

Asking for feedback from people who use harm reduction supplies can help build relationships. It benefits both programs and those using the supplies.

Having a client centred approach can help shape services and their delivery. It's important for people to know their feedback is needed and valued. When feedback is received that could be a 'quality control issue', it's important that information is shared right away. Contact the program/agency where you received the supplies, letting them know the defect or concern. Follow up on concerns if you see recurring problems with supplies.



### Try these lines:

"Have you tried all 3 types of cookers? Which do you prefer using. I would like to understand what you like and don't like about it."

"What do you think about the mouthpieces? Is there anything that you'd change about them? What would need to change for you to want to use them?"

"We received these needles recently. Did you try them? It's OK if you don't like them, I'm curious how they compare with the ones you usually use."

# SCRIPTS



“Hey, make sure to filter your drugs. Especially if you're injecting pills. That'll give you a cleaner shot with less damage to veins.”

## NEEDLES & SYRINGES

- “Oh, you're taking 25Gs. Any reason why you prefer those?”
- “Oh, you're taking 5ml barrels? What do you use them for?”
- “Take as many needles as you think you'll need. It's best to use a new everything for every shot; that includes new cooker, filter and water.”

## COOKERS

- “I was wondering, do you cook your drugs? It can help prevent infections.”
- “Hey! Do you know what the little pad inside the Stericup and One-Use cooker package is meant to do? It's actually a dry swab for post-injection!”

## FILTERS

- “Hey, make sure to filter your drugs. Especially if you're shooting pills. That'll give you a cleaner injection with less damage to veins.”

## TOURNIQUET

- “Hey, I noticed you didn't grab a tourniquet. Do you need/use one?”
- “Do you have difficulties finding a vein? Maybe you can try these techniques...”
- “How do you apply your tourniquet? Can I show you a 'quick release' technique?”

## VITAMIN C

- “If you need Vit C, just use a pinch – like ¼ of the package. Too much can really hurt your veins. Better to add a bit more, than having too much in your drug solution.”
- “Hey, I see you are taking Vit C, can you tell me what drugs you are using it with? Using it when you don't need it can hurt your veins.”



## ALCOHOL SWABS

- “Do you have enough swabs? You know that you should wipe the injection site in one direction only. Wiping back and forth doesn’t actually clean it.”

## WATER

- “Just make sure you don’t re-use an open ampoule. Once it’s open, it gets contaminated quickly.”

## FOIL

- “If you have issues with finding a vein, you might consider smoking from foil. It’ll give your veins a chance to heal a bit.”
- “Have you tried to make a foil pipe? If not, I can show you how.”

## BZK WIPES

- “BZK wipes are awesome for cleaning your hands, especially if you don’t have soap and water. You will still need an alcohol swab to clean the injection site.”

## BOWL PIPES AND STRAIGHT STEMS

- “There are risks with using retrofitted bowl pipes or straight stems. Makeshift pipes can blow up, and cut or burn your lips.”

## SCREENS

- “You mentioned you don’t like using the brass screens. If you’re interested, I can show you some folding methods that might work for you better.”

## MOUHPIECES

- “Hey, you want a bowl pipe/straight stem? Don’t forget the mouthpiece – it goes with it.”
- “Remember to use your own mouthpiece when smoking. It’ll protect you and others from infection.”
- “Do you have enough mouthpieces? Always safest not to share your own.”

## PUSH STICKS

- “When scraping the resin with metal objects, the pipe can break. Try these wooden push sticks instead.”

## STRAWS

- “Straws come in colours so you always know which colour is yours. It’s always best not to share.”
- “You should try and keep the paper dry. If you grab a handful of straws, try to keep them in a dry place. That way, you’re sure your straws are ready whenever you need them?”



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# USEFUL LINKS

Best Practice Recommendations for Canadian Harm Reduction Programs

[www.catie.ca/en/programming/best-practices-harm-reduction](http://www.catie.ca/en/programming/best-practices-harm-reduction)

CATIE Canada's source for HIV and Hepatitis C – A source for information about various harm reduction topics, HIV and Hepatitis C

[www.catie.ca/en/about](http://www.catie.ca/en/about)

Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program OHRDP – A source for information about harm reduction supplies

[www.ohrdp.ca](http://www.ohrdp.ca)

Ontario Harm Reduction Network (OHRN) – A source for harm reduction information and practices

[www.ohrn.org](http://www.ohrn.org)

European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction EMCDDA – A source of best practice and other publications about prevention, treatment, harm reduction and social reintegration

[www.emcdda.europa.eu/emcdda-home-page\\_en](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/emcdda-home-page_en)

Harm Reduction International HRI

[www.hri.global](http://www.hri.global)

Exchange Supplies – A source for educational materials and resources

[www.exchangesupplies.org](http://www.exchangesupplies.org)

Harm Reduction Coalition – A source for various harm reduction topics

[www.harmreduction.org/our-resources/text-publicationsreports/all-publications](http://www.harmreduction.org/our-resources/text-publicationsreports/all-publications)

Getting Off Right: A Safety Manual for Injection Drug Users

[www.harmreduction.org/drugs-and-drug-users/drug-tools/getting-off-right](http://www.harmreduction.org/drugs-and-drug-users/drug-tools/getting-off-right)

CATIE Resources: Sharp Shooters (Harm Reduction Info for Injection Drug Users)

[www.orders.catie.ca/book/sharp-shooters](http://www.orders.catie.ca/book/sharp-shooters)

General information about various types of drugs

[www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/a-z-of-drugs/Pages/a-z-of-drugs.aspx](http://www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/a-z-of-drugs/Pages/a-z-of-drugs.aspx)

Alcohol and Drug Foundation – Information about drugs

[www.adf.org.au/drug-facts](http://www.adf.org.au/drug-facts)

Crystal methamphetamine

[www.sexntina.nl/en/basics/gebruikstechniek](http://www.sexntina.nl/en/basics/gebruikstechniek)

A user's guide to metamphetamine –

A self-help guide to reduce harm for people who use methamphetamine

[www.waterlooregiondrugstrategy.ca/en/prevention-and-safer-drug-use/resources/Documents/METHbooklet.pdf](http://www.waterlooregiondrugstrategy.ca/en/prevention-and-safer-drug-use/resources/Documents/METHbooklet.pdf)

Safer Injecting – reducing the harm associated with injecting drug use

[www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/guides/mqi\\_safer\\_injecting\\_guide.pdf](http://www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/guides/mqi_safer_injecting_guide.pdf)

Injecting Advice for Harm Reduction Workers and Injectors – offers support and advice to people working in harm reduction services

[www.injectingadvice.com](http://www.injectingadvice.com)

Injecting Fentanyl – Minimizing The Risks

[www.aivl.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Injecting-Fentanyl-Minimising-The-Risks.pdf](http://www.aivl.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Injecting-Fentanyl-Minimising-The-Risks.pdf)

L'Association Québécoise pour la promotion de la santé des personnes utilisatrices de drogues (AQPSUD) (in French only)

[www.aqpsud.org](http://www.aqpsud.org) and [www.linjecteur.ca](http://www.linjecteur.ca)

**Connecting - A Guide to Using Harm Reduction  
Supplies as Engagement Tools was produced by:**



a program of



**in collaboration with:**



a program of



For any questions about harm reduction supplies, contact OHRDP  
at [info@ohrdp.ca](mailto:info@ohrdp.ca) or visit [www.ohrdp.ca](http://www.ohrdp.ca).

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For any questions about harm reduction information and practices,  
contact OHRN at [info@ohrn.org](mailto:info@ohrn.org) or visit [www.ohrn.org](http://www.ohrn.org).

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