

## Safer Injecting Information sheet



Date.....

Client's name.....

Worker's name.....

Comments.....

### The risks

When injecting, the main risks you can expose yourself to are:

- hepatitis - the virus that attacks your liver
- Human immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) - the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)
- infection from bacteria
- overdose
- vein damage
- increasing your level of drug dependence

### Safer drug use

It's possible to avoid the risks by not injecting.

- Heroin can be smoked or sniffed
- Cocaine can be sniffed or smoked as crack
- Amphetamines can be swallowed or sniffed

This will do far less damage to your body; you get almost the same dose and it lasts longer.

### Avoiding viral infections

A virus is a tiny organism that can live in cells. If enough blood cells containing a viral infection pass into your bloodstream, you'll become infected.

You can avoid this by preparing and injecting carefully. Make sure that when the needle goes into your vein, nothing you're using or injecting could have been contaminated by a drop of someone else's blood.

This means the needle, drugs **and** injecting equipment mustn't have been used by anyone else's:

- needle or syringe
- mixing water
- spoon
- filter

The best protection is to have your own spoon and mixing water cup and **never** let anyone else use them. Wash them before and after use - preferably in boiling water. Using other people's filters is dangerous because they often come into direct contact with used needles and are moist and warm - which is an ideal environment for viruses and bacteria.

### Avoiding overdose

You don't have to take a lethal dose of drugs to die from an overdose - it only takes a tablespoon of fluid to kill you if you're on your back, unconscious and unable to swallow. This has been the cause

of many overdose deaths. Usually overdose deaths are caused by people mixing sedative drugs such as:

- alcohol
- temazepam
- diazepam (valium)
- methadone
- heroin

These drugs work together to make each other stronger. Remember, drugs you swallow reach peak levels one - four hours after you take them; this means an injection can push you over the lethal limit hours after taking something orally.

Another cause of many overdoses is people being clean for a while and then going back to opiates. If you stop using drugs, especially opiates, your tolerance drops within a few weeks. So, if you go back to injecting as much as you were, it could kill you. Every year this kills hundreds of drug users; you can reduce the risk of overdose by:

- smoking, snorting or swallowing instead of injecting
- taking a test dose of drugs to get a feel for the strength before you inject
- only injecting half of the barrel and waiting until you get the first rush  
- if it knocks you out, injecting more could kill you
- not mixing sedative drugs

You can reduce the risk of overdose being fatal by:

- learning how to deal with overdoses when you see them happening
- having other people around when you inject

### Avoiding vein damage

Having found a safe site, it's important to use the smallest needle you can. The smaller the hole and the less damage done to the inside of a vein, the longer it'll last.

1. Put the needle into the skin parallel to the vein, with the tip pointing in the same direction as the blood flow, and then slide it into the vein. Take care to make sure you don't go straight through it
2. Pull back a little to check you're still in the vein. If you're using a tourniquet, release it and then inject slowly - the faster you inject the greater the risk of tearing the vein around the needle and fluid escaping around the needle
3. Once you've finished injecting, slide the needle out of the vein straight away and apply pressure to the site. This prevents bleeding and bruising

Pulling blood back into the syringe and 'flushing' it back into the vein doesn't help and it can cause extra damage to the vein by:

- making the entry hole bigger
- damaging the lining of the vein
- causing extra clotting of blood and vein blockage by increasing turbulence

### How to clean used needles

This method isn't guaranteed to make injecting with used needles safe - infection from bacteria on the needle and hepatitis are still a possibility, but if you're going to reuse needles or syringes you should:

1. Draw **cold** water (sterile or cool boiled is best) into the syringe and then flush it out (down the sink or into a different cup)
2. Do this twice then slowly draw household bleach into the syringe and slowly - over 30 seconds or more - flush it out (down the sink or into a different cup)  
**Note** - If you haven't got any bleach to use for step two you can use washing-up liquid mixed with water - it isn't as good but it is better than nothing
3. Do this twice then draw up the **cold** water and flush it out into the sink or a different cup.  
Do this twice too

If you ever re-use needles, practice this technique so you can do it without making any mistakes. Doing it incorrectly could increase your chances of catching hepatitis or HIV.