



Pharmaceutical  
Society of Australia



# Safer Injecting Practice

**There is no completely safe way of injecting drugs, but the risks to yourself and others can be reduced by using clean and sterile equipment and injecting techniques and safe disposal methods.**

## Risks of injecting drugs

Injecting is the most risky way to use drugs. The two greatest risks with injecting drugs are:

- Accidental overdose
- Receiving or passing on a blood-borne virus such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV. Bloodborne viruses are spread when infected body fluids from one person pass into the bloodstream of another person.

Other risks associated with injecting include bacterial blood poisoning, skin infections and vein damage.

## Self care and caring for others

- Eat regular, healthy meals including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grains. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- If you are hepatitis positive, avoid alcohol and fatty foods as they make hepatitis symptoms worse.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises otherwise).
- Get plenty of rest and relaxation. Learn some relaxation techniques.
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.
- Clean and check your teeth regularly, as some drugs can increase tooth decay. Visit a dentist regularly.
- Be vaccinated against hepatitis B. There is no vaccination against hepatitis C or HIV. If you think you have been exposed to hepatitis C or HIV, ask a doctor for a blood test.

- Have other people around when you inject, so help is near if needed.
- Join an ambulance fund. Police do not automatically come when an ambulance is called.
- Learn first-aid skills such as resuscitation (CPR) – others may need your help.
- Do not use a combination of drugs or drugs and alcohol – this increases the risk of overdose.
- Do not inject methadone or buprenorphine that has been in someone's mouth. Mouth germs can cause blood infection.
- Do not let other people inject you or touch your injection site unless they have first washed their hands thoroughly with warm soapy water.

## Important

Consult a doctor immediately if:

- An injection site or area becomes painful, swollen or inflamed (hot and red)
- Significant bleeding occurs
- Any area of your skin becomes sore, weeps or changes colour.

In an emergency phone 000 and ask for an ambulance. If using a mobile phone out of range, dial 112. This will connect even if there is no network coverage from your provider.

## Safer injecting

### Preparation

- Always prepare your own clean mixing and injecting area (e.g., lay out some clean paper). Bring everything you need into/onto your area.
- Always wash your hands well with warm soapy water before and after all stages of handling equipment and injecting.
- Clean skin at injection site with soap and water or an alcohol swab before and after injecting.
- Before you inject, take off any rings or close-fitting jewellery. If something goes wrong, fingers or toes can swell very quickly.

### Equipment

- Always use new, clean and sterile equipment. Do not reuse equipment.
- 'Needle and Syringe Programs' (NSP) can provide sterile 'fits' (needles and syringes), water and filters and other clean equipment to users confidentially.
- 'Fit Packs' containing sterile needles, syringes, water and swabs and a spoon are sold by some pharmacies.
- Never share any equipment. Sharing equipment of any kind can lead to infection. Hepatitis C and HIV are spread more easily by injecting equipment than by sex.
- Never let used equipment come into contact with a group mix or new equipment.
- Always draw solution through a fresh, clean filter before injecting, to remove impurities (e.g., talc or chalk) that can block blood vessels. NSPs can provide filters to remove impurities and also filters to sterilise the mix. If you do not have a proper filter, draw the mix through a new swab, tampon or

cotton bud to remove impurities (this will not sterilise the mix). Do not use cigarette filters that have been smoked. Do not reuse filters.

### Injecting

Take care to protect your veins as a collapsed vein never recovers.

- Only inject into veins (not arteries) and rotate your injection site to reduce vein damage.
- Always inject slowly. Try a small dose first to test drug strength.
- Never inject where there is redness, pain, swelling or infection
- Never 'pull back' blood into the fit after a shot – this can increase vein damage.
- Never inject highly irritant substances (e.g., pills, capsules, temazepam, methadone). If you want to inject pills, filter the mix first. Get proper filters from an NSP (or if using something else as a filter, filter at least three times before injecting).

### After injecting

- Stop the flow of blood after injecting with clean cotton wool, tissues or toilet paper
- Rinse your fit with clean, cold water straight after injecting to help remove traces of blood
- Recap your own needle. Do not recap other's needles
- Put used fits in a sharps-bin, or puncture/child-proof container and return to your NSP. Special disposal bins are also provided at some health centres and public places.
- Clean up and safely dispose of all used equipment. (Put in fit container or inside two plastic bags)
- Wash blood contaminated tourniquet and clothes immediately.

## Related fact cards

- *Drug Overdose* (website only – ask your pharmacist)
- *First Aid in the Home*
- *HIV/AIDS*
- *Methadone & Buprenorphine* (website only – ask your pharmacist)
- *Oral Health*
- *Relaxation Techniques*

## For more information

### Alcohol and Drug Information Services (ADIS)

	Australia-wide	State-wide
NSW	(02) 9361 8000	1800 422 599
QLD	(07) 3837 5989	1800 177 833
WA	(08) 9442 5000	1800 198 024
NT	(08) 89228399	1800 131 350
SA	(08) 83638618	1300 131 340
TAS		1800 811 994
VIC	1800 888 236	
ACT	(02) 6207 9977	

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

### Australian Drug Foundation Drug Info Clearinghouse

– DrugInfo phone 1300 85 85 84 or website [www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au)

### Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League – AIVL

– phone (02) 6279 1600 or website [www.aivl.org.au](http://www.aivl.org.au)

**Exchange** – website [www.saferinjecting.info](http://www.saferinjecting.info)

**Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

**NPS Medicines Line** – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

**The Poisons Information Centre** – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.