



## Safer Injecting

### Introduction

This information is intended mainly for people who inject heroin. Brief information is also given about other drugs that are sometimes injected.

Injecting drugs can become routine. This information can help reconsider what you do and reduce some of the risks.

Injecting drugs is always risky.

- Sharing, lending or borrowing injecting equipment can spread hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV
- Poor injecting technique or dirty equipment can damage veins and cause infection and blood poisoning
- Lowered tolerance and the unknown purity of street drugs can result in overdose
- Using more than one downer-type drug is extremely dangerous; never mix drugs like heroin, valium, temazepam and alcohol.

**IT IS ALWAYS SAFER NOT TO INJECT DRUGS AT ALL**

### The 7 rules of Safer Injecting

1. Never share, lend or borrow used injecting equipment, including:
  - \*Needles      \*filters      \*syringes
  - \*Water        \*ascorbic or citric acid
  - \*Mixing equipment   \*spoons or other cookers
2. Use the smallest possible needle to inject. (Unless injecting into the femoral vein (groin) when it is more appropriate to use a blue gauge needle.)
3. Use the smallest possible amount of water
4. Always inject in the direction of blood flow (towards your heart).
5. Always inject with the eye of the needle facing upwards. This means that the sharp point of the needle pierces the skin.

6. Don't inject drugs on your own. Try and do it with others around you so that they can help if you overdose.
7. Dispose of your used equipment carefully. Get a sharps bin from your drug service. Always keep the box out of the reach of children.

## Protecting your health

### Basic Hygiene

Keep your injecting equipment and the space where you inject clean to avoid infections, abscesses and other serious health problems. Always wash your hands well before and after injecting. Prepare your hit on something that you can throw away afterwards, such as a newspaper or magazine. Don't share this 'protected space' with anyone else' with anyone else. **Be blood aware.** Think about how tiny amounts of blood might be passed from one person to another.

### Cleaning Injecting equipment

Cleaning used syringes and needles, even with bleach, may not kill blood-borne viruses such as HIV and hepatitis. **Always use sterile syringes and needles every time you inject.**

If it isn't possible to use a new and sterile needle and syringe only re-use your own and take and take the following 3 steps:-

1. Flush out the syringe with fresh, clean, cold water – **repeat this step**
2. Draw bleach through the needle into the syringe. Leave some air in it and shake it vigorously for at least 30 seconds. Squirt the bleach down the drain or toilet - **repeat this step**
3. Flush out the syringe again with fresh, clean, cold water. Do not use the water you used in step 1 - **repeat this step**

### Bruising and swelling

If you regularly notice bruising, it may be that you are doing something wrong when you inject. If you get swelling, redness or pain around an injecting site, **seek medical advice immediately.** Early treatment can prevent serious complications later.

### Hitting an artery

If you hit an artery, blood will rush up into the syringe and can even push the plunger up. Do not inject. Remove the needle and press on the site for 5 minutes. If you leg/arm/hand becomes swollen, red or very painful, **seek medical help immediately** - the longer you leave it the more likely you are to lose a limb.



## Injecting Other Drugs

### Injecting tablets

Injecting tablets is dangerous. There is no safe way to do it, but it is much safer to swallow them with a hot drink. They will take longer to 'come on' but the effect will be much the same.

### Injecting Temazepam

Injecting Temazepam is very dangerous as it irritates and burns the inside of the vein (this is true of most injected substances, but Temazepam is particularly bad). There is no safe way to inject Temazepam – swallow it with a hot drink.

### Injecting Cocaine

Injecting cocaine can be very frequent and because pain is deadened around the injecting site (cocaine is a local anaesthetic), veins become damaged very quickly.

### Injecting Methadone Mixture

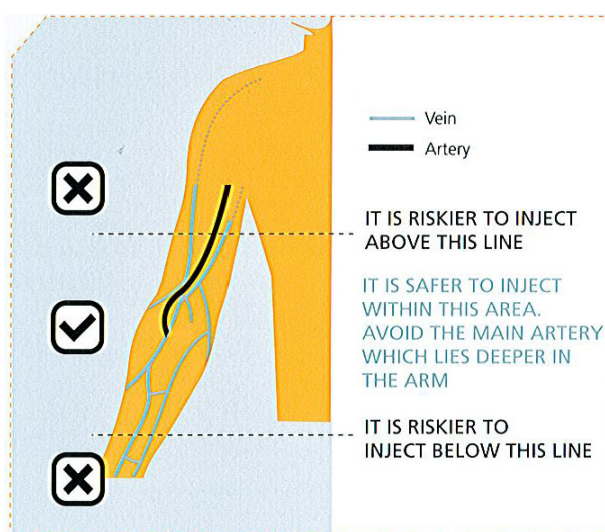
Methadone mixture is meant to be swallowed, not injected, it can cause many problems including abscesses and damage to veins.

### Injecting Amphetamine (speed)

Street speed (powder) is usually less than 5% pure. If injected, the impurities in it may cause a 'bad hit' - intense headache, feeling hit etc. Amphetamine paste (base) is much stronger, and will irritate the skin and veins, and cause other injuries.

## Injecting sites on the arm

**The veins in the arm are the safest site for injecting.**



## Other Injecting sites

### **Muscles under the skin and missed hits**

Injecting into the muscles or just under the skin can cause very serious problems. Drugs are absorbed much more slowly if you inject in these ways, giving the heroin/acid mixture more time to cause damage to the injection sites and to increase the chance of serious infection. 'Missed hits' can cause similar problems.

Injecting again if you have had a missed or 'dirty' hit is risky. It takes time for drugs to be absorbed into the blood stream. If you inject again, you increase the risk of overdose.

Heroin contaminated with extremely dangerous bacteria can cause infection, blood poisoning and death very quickly when injected into body tissue rather than veins. If you get swelling, redness or pain around the injection site, **seek medical attention immediately.**

If you regularly miss veins, inject into muscles or inject just under the skin, ask your drug services for advice and alternatives.

### **Groin (femoral)**

Groin injecting is very dangerous. An artery and a major nerve lie next to the veins. If you hit either of these, then you can do serious damage and may even lose a leg. If you already inject into the groin, ask your drug service for advice about alternatives.

### **The neck, armpits and breasts**

Don't do it! Injecting into these areas is extremely dangerous, as there are arteries, veins and nerves close together. The veins are often small and can be damaged easily. If you have to inject and you have no obvious veins, ask your drug service for advice about alternatives.

## A step by step guide to reducing the risks from injecting street heroin

<b>DANGER POINTS</b>		<b>SAFER INJECTING</b>
Infection, causing abscesses and other health problems.	<b>WAS YOUR HANDS</b>	Wash your hands and the area of the skin that you are going to inject into before you start.
Using a surface where anybody else has injected is risky. Viruses could be present in tiny amounts of blood.	<b>SURFACE</b>	Use a clean newspaper or magazine as a surface to prepare your hit. Dispose of it safely
Heroin can contain dangerous bacteria.	<b>HEROIN</b>	Try to ensure that you inject into a vein – keep an eye on ‘misses’ and get help if the area becomes red hot.
Has anyone used the cooker before? Someone may have ‘flushed back’ on to it.	<b>INTO COOKER</b>	Use your own cooker – ideally find something you can use once and throw away afterwards.
An acid needs to be added to brown street heroin to help it dissolve. Vinegar and lemon juice can carry germs and fungal infections which may damage your eyes	<b>ADD AN ACID</b>	Use a powdered citric or ascorbic acid (vitamin C). All acids can damage your veins and skin. Use the smallest possible amount to red
Has anyone used the water or flushed into it? Don’t share water or water containers.	<b>ADD WATER</b>	Use sterile water if your needle exchange supplies it. Otherwise use cooled freshly boiled water. If this is not possible, use fresh, cold tap water.
Don’t heat the gear for a long time.	<b>HEAT &amp; COOL</b>	Brown gear only needs to be heated for short time – the more you heat the more heroin you will lose in the vapor.
Has the filter been used before? Hepatitis and HIV can be transmitted by sharing filters. Saving and re-using filters increases the chance of a bad hit.	<b>ADD A FILTER</b>	Use only clean hand rolled filters and throw away after use.
Is your syringe clean and unused? Do you ever front-load or back-load (sharing drugs out by squirting drugs out from one syringe to another)? The other syringe may not be clean.	<b>DRAW UP INTO A SYRINGE</b>	Always use a new sterile syringe every time. If you front load or back-load, USE STERILE WORKS.
Do not use a tourniquet unless you have to; other ways of raising veins include ‘pumping’ your fist or tightening your sleeve around your upper arm.	<b>GETTING A VEIN UP</b>	If you do use a tourniquet, make sure you release it BEFORE you push down the plunger.
Do not inject into muscles or just under the skin. Using the same vein every time may cause it to collapse. Veins need to rest.	<b>INJECTING SITES</b>	Alternate injecting sites on your arms. Feeling for veins can be a good way of finding new ones.
The bigger the needle the greater the damage.	<b>EYE OF THE NEEDLE FACING UPWARDS</b>	Always use the smallest possible needle with the eye of the needle facing upwards. This ensures that the sharp point of the needle pierces the skin.
Don’t ‘fish’ around. Repeated stabbing will cause bruising and scarring	<b>SMOOTHLY SLIDE NEEDLE INTO THE VEIN</b>	One clean stab increases the chance of hitting the chosen vein.

Don't inject immediately; you may have missed the vein.	<b>SLOWLY PULL BACK THE PLUNGER</b>	Check that you are in the vein by slowly pulling back on the plunger – a small amount of blood should trickle into the syringe.
Injecting too quickly increases the chances of vein damage and you will not get the chance to check if the heroin is very strong.	<b>INJECT SLOWLY</b>	If you use a tourniquet, release it before you inject. Always inject slowly.
Withdrawing too quickly can cause the vein to collapse.	<b>WITHDRAW NEEDLE SLOWLY</b>	Withdraw the needle slowly. Being careful means you will be able to use veins for longer with fewer problems.
Leaving used works around is dangerous.	<b>SAFE DISPOSAL</b>	Put your works in a sharps bin.
Bleeding will cause bruising, making it more difficult to hit the vein next time.	<b>PRESS ON THE SITE</b>	Ideally use something; 'blood proof' like a plaster to press on the injection site.
Blood on your hands can transfer to anything you touch.	<b>WASH YOUR HANDS AGAIN</b>	As soon as you are able to - wash your hands. PROTECT YOUR FRIENDS.