

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!

A quick guide for people who inject

Rotating Veins

If you inject in your favorite spot over and over without letting the veins repair themselves, they could become seriously infected and will eventually collapse. Rotate the sites you use to inject! Try to use a new site for each new injection, and go back to sites you've already used only after they've had time to rest and repair themselves. Don't inject into red or swollen areas.

Veins vs. Arteries/Nerves

ONLY inject into veins. Veins have no pulse, and the blood they carry is a deep, dark red.

Arteries: Arteries have a pulse, and the blood in them is bright red and frothy. IF YOU HIT AN ARTERY, the blood loss can be life threatening. Immediately pull your needle out and raise the limb above your head to stop the bleeding. Apply firm pressure for at least 10 minutes. If it keeps bleeding, seek medical attention immediately.

Nerves: If you hit a nerve, you risk paralysis or the need for amputation. You'll know you've hit one because you will experience extreme pain and no blood will enter the syringe. Seek medical attention immediately.

Safer Disposal

It is important to dispose of syringes correctly so they don't stick any waste removal workers. Do not break off the tip of the needle, as they are very difficult to see in a pile of trash and can injure someone. Place the syringe, with caps on if possible, into a hard container like a coffee can, laundry detergent bottle, or any other hard plastic/aluminum container. If possible, add dirt, plaster, or concrete. Tape up the lid and write BIOHAZARD on the container in permanent marker. Toss in regular trashcan. Don't recycle.

If someone overdoses:

1. If the person doesn't respond or seems to have stopped breathing, **try to bring them around** by pinching their earlobes or rubbing their breastbone with your knuckles. Try to get them up and walking around. Talk to them. It's important to **keep them as alert as possible.**
2. If they have stopped breathing, they need attention immediately or they will die within minutes. Give them mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but DO NOT pump their chest. If you have naloxone/Narcan, administer it. **Call 911 and tell them the person has stopped breathing.**
3. Lay them in the recovery position; on their side with their arm folded under their head, and their outside knee pushed up so they **don't roll over.**



4. If the person is unconscious, call 911 immediately! You don't have to tell the operator that the person has OD'd. When the ambulance arrives, tell the EMTs that the person sometimes uses 'x' drug. They can best help the person if they know what has happened. You don't have to tell them you used drugs with your friend, & they generally won't call the police unless they are physically threatened.

Abscesses

What are abscesses? They are pockets of bacteria & pus that form under the skin. Your body creates a wall around the bacteria to keep the bacteria from infecting your whole body. They begin with redness, swelling, & tenderness at an injection site and develop into an infection with a hard, pus-filled core.

What's the worst thing that can happen? They can burst under your skin & cause an infection of your whole body. An all over bacterial infection can kill you. Another super bad thing that can happen is endocarditis, an infection of the lining of your heart, or "septic embolism," where a lump of the contaminants in the abscess get loose in your body and lodge in your lungs or brain.

Why do abscesses happen? Abscesses result from missed hits, failing to clean the injection site prior to injecting, using dirty injection equipment, or skin-popping. To avoid abscesses, clean the skin prior to injection. Alcohol pads work well, but make sure to wipe in only one direction & not in a circular motion, which will cause the germs to stay on your skin. Soap & water work fine, as do rubbing alcohol and hydrogen peroxide.

What can I do about an abscess if I get one?

Keep the area clean & apply hot compresses 3x a day. This will either help the abscess go away without opening or help bring it to a head. If it comes to a head, you can get the abscess opened and drained at a hospital or clinic. If you experience fever, chills, extreme fatigue, or pain associated with an abscess, seek medical attention immediately because you could have a blood infection. Try going to a community clinic or wound clinic before you go to the ER; chances are, the ER doctor will not be as sympathetic. Once treated, make sure you are changing the dressing regularly to encourage quick healing.

Sharing & Reusing

Sharing syringes & other injection equipment (cookers, cotton, tourniquets, water, straws):

You can get HIV and Hepatitis C by sharing any injection equipment. Hepatitis C is ten times more infectious than HIV, and can live in the barrel of a syringe for weeks. Both viruses are spread by blood contact; so if a syringe that has infected blood touches a cooker, cotton, or bottle of water, then all of that equipment becomes infected. This is why you should never share any equipment that is used to prepare or inject drugs.

What about bleach? If a syringe is properly cleaned with bleach and water using the 3x3x3 method, it will usually kill HIV. However, it will not kill Hepatitis C, which is a virus that can lead to liver cancer, cirrhosis, and death if untreated. If you must share a syringe, flush it with *cold* water **three** times. Then flush it with undiluted bleach **three** times. Keep the bleach in the syringe for a full two minutes while shaking it. Flush the syringe with clean, cold water **three** more times.

Reusing your own equipment: As long as your equipment has not been contaminated by anybody else's, you cannot give yourself HIV or Hepatitis by reusing your own equipment. However, each time you use your needle, it develops microscopic barbs that do more damage to your veins each time you reuse it, causing abscesses & scarring. If you know you will be reusing your syringe, flush it with cold water after using it to get rid of bacteria. It is best practice to use a new syringe for every injection. Reusing your cookers is alright as long as you rinse it with cold water after using it to prevent bacteria from growing. Cottons are impossible to clean & harbor bacteria and fungus, & it is best to discard them after each use. Do not use cigarette filters, since they contain chemicals that are bad for your veins & blood.