

APPENDIX 4

Safer injecting and cleaning injecting equipment

The sharing of injecting equipment is the single greatest risk factor for contracting hepatitis C virus (HCV) among those who inject drugs. There are options other than injecting drugs, such as smoking, snorting or swallowing drugs, which will significantly reduce the risk of contracting HCV, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and other blood-borne viruses. If snorting is the alternative mode of administration, the sharing of straws is not recommended due to a low risk of HCV transmission.

<p>Injecting with sterile equipment</p>	<p>For people who do choose to inject drugs, transmission can be prevented through the exclusive use of sterile fits (needle and syringe), water and swabs (one to swab the spoon and one to swab the arm), clean filters, a clean and detachable tourniquet, and clean hands. The injecting space should also be clean and all blood contact avoided. Sterile equipment is equipment that has undergone a process that destroys viruses, bacteria and germs. Sterile injecting equipment includes pre-packaged fits, water and swabs, that are marked as sterile. All other equipment needs to be cleaned with soap and water or with a swab. Table 3.4 describes safe injecting procedures in detail.</p> <p>There is no way of eliminating the risk of viral transmission from used syringes. If patients seek advice about re-using injecting equipment, the need for sterile equipment must be reiterated.</p>
<p>Using cleaned injecting equipment</p>	<p>People who decide to inject with a used fit must be advised that they risk becoming equipment infected with HIV, hepatitis B virus (HBV) and HCV. In addition, they should be advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using your own fit will be safer than a fit used by another person • the more thoroughly a fit is cleaned, the less risk of infection • cleaning is important for people who are already infected with a blood-borne virus infection because they can be re-infected with another strain of HCV, HBV or HIV. Re-infection with another strain of HCV or another hepatitis virus may place added strain on the liver.
<p>How to clean injecting equipment</p>	<p>The following are directions on how to clean used injecting equipment. A clean workspace equipment and a safe area for fluid disposal (sink, bin, drain etc) are required. Wash your hands before you begin.</p>
<p>1. Equipment</p>	<p>Three separate containers filled with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Clean water from the cold tap, for rinsing the blood out of your fit. Use water from the cold tap – preferably soapy water. This is best for rinsing out blood because water that is too hot or too cold can cause the blood to congeal and stick inside the fit, where it can shed microscopic particles into your mix. b. Full strength bleach for soaking and bleaching your fit (5.25% sodium hypochlorite). c. Clean water from the cold tap to rinse the bleach from your fit.
<p>2. Cleaning process</p>	<p>a. Rinsing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rinse the fit in clean water from the cold tap from the first container. • Squirt the water out into your sink or safe fluid disposal area. • Repeat until you cannot see any traces of blood. <p>b. Bleaching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use full strength bleach (at least 5.25% sodium hypochlorite and check the use-by date). • Take the fit apart. • Soak it completely, covering it with bleach for at least two minutes. <p>If you can't soak:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw the bleach into the fit and shake it for at least thirty seconds (or while you count slowly to 30). • Squirt the bleach out into your sink or safe disposal area. • Repeat the process at least once, again counting slowly to thirty (as above). <p>c. Flushing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw up fresh water from the third container. • Do NOT use water from the FIRST container as this has been contaminated with blood. • Squirt, flushing the water into the safe fluid disposal area or sink. • Repeat flushing process until all the bleach has been removed. • FLUSH AT LEAST SIX TIMES.

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3. When you have cleaned your fit follow the guidelines for safer injecting (References 5 and 6 in Chapter 3)

4. Some handy hints for being 'blood aware'

- Stock up on equipment so you won't be caught short.
- Make sure the surface where you prepare your hit is clean.
- Wash your hands with warm soapy water before and after injecting. This will remove any traces of blood from your fingers, as well as any unhygienic dirt.
- No matter how well-cleaned, never let your used equipment, or anyone else's used equipment, come into contact with a group mix. Unless sterile fits are used to mix and divide up, then each member of the group must have their own water, spoon and filter (as well as their own fit).
- If someone is going to help you inject, make sure they wash their hands before and after.
- It is best to have your own tourniquet that you don't share. Try not to get blood on your tourniquet. Detachable (medical) tourniquets will make this easier.
- Rinse your fit in clean water from the cold tap immediately after your hit, even if you are disposing of it. This will remove most of the blood that is present, and therefore reduce the chance of a virus staying alive in your fit. It will also prevent it from blocking, and help reduce the likelihood of 'dirty hits' if you have to use the fit again.
- If you are going to save your fit for personal re-use, keep track of it (mark it), and keep it safe.
- Wash or swab your spoon after each hit, and wash your tourniquet with soapy water as soon as possible to remove blood spills.
- Always dispose of fits safely, in an approved disposal bin, sharps container or childproof, puncture-proof container. Whenever possible, return sharps containers/used fits to your local needle and syringe program.
- Do not reuse swabs, filters or opened sterile water: they become contaminated with bacteria and fungi when exposed to air. Dispose of them in the recommended sharps container you have used to dispose of your used fits, or place inside two plastic bags (double bagging). Return your sharps container to your local needle and syringe program. If it is not possible to return your used fits to a needle and syringe program, you can place the sealed container into the rubbish bin.
- Also dispose of blood-contaminated materials as above. If you get blood on your clothes, etc. throw them straight into the wash with a good measure of washing powder.

Appendix 4 adapted from: Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League. Cleaning Fits. Canberra: National Hepatitis C Education and Prevention Program, Australian National Council on HIV/AIDS and Related Diseases; 2001.