

Exchange Works - Key Messages and Education

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Introduction

A significant harm for people who use substances particularly by injection, is the risk of blood borne diseases such as HIV and hepatitis B and C.¹

The provision of a reliable and accessible supply of sterile injecting and smoking equipment will assist in reducing the risk of these blood borne infections.

Purpose

Exchange Works staff may be asked to offer information to clients on topics and needs expressed by the client including referral for treatment. Let the client guide the interaction and allow them to indicate if they would like to discuss the information or their personal circumstances with the worker during the exchange. All interactions should be done in a confidential non-judgmental manner.

Procedures

1. Share the following **general harm reduction messages:**

- If injecting drugs, use a new needle and syringe each time you inject.
- If injecting drugs, do not share needles/syringes, or any other equipment.
 - Injecting with a used needle puts people who inject drugs at risk for hepatitis B, C and HIV and can also damage the skin, soft tissue, and veins.
 - The practice of bleaching a used needle for the purpose of reusing is not recommended as the prevention of the spread of disease and infection is not guaranteed.
- Return used needles and supplies to where you received them or dispose of them in a safe container manner.
- We offer a variety of needle and syringe and sharps container sizes to accommodate client needs.
- Practice safer sex and use condoms.
- Consider immunization with hepatitis B and A vaccine, available free of charge to people who inject substances.

2. Share the following regarding safer injection information if appropriate:

Set up

- Have everything you need within reach.
- Have a clean surface to work on such as an open newspaper or magazine or open up a pamphlet.
- Avoid injecting alone - be with someone you trust.
- If you can, wash your hands first.
- If water is not available, use alcohol-based hand rub, BZK Wipes or alcohol swabs to clean your hands.
- Use an alcohol swab to clean your injection site before injecting.

Safer Sites for Injection

- The veins in your arms are the easiest to see and inject into and would be the preferred site to use.
- The hands are less safe than arms because the veins are smaller. If using hands use the thinnest needle possible.
- Avoid using veins in your legs and feet. The veins in the feet are smaller, easier to damage and take longer to recover. Legs are the highest risk area for developing blood clots.
- Never use veins in your neck, groin, or wrists. Using these veins is dangerous because they are closer to arteries. Never inject into the genitals.
- It is important to rotate sites to allow for healing to take place.

Alcohol Swabs

- Alcohol swabs are used to clean injection sites and if needed, fingers/thumbs prior to injecting. Using alcohol swabs can reduce the occurrence of bacterial infections and abscesses.
 - Hepatitis C has been detected on used alcohol swabs- so avoid reuse or sharing.
- Alcohol swabs should be used to clean the skin prior to injection and not to stop blood flow after injection.

Cookers/Spoons

- Cookers are used to mix drugs into a solution.
- Reusing or sharing a cooker puts people at risk of blood borne viruses including HIV and hepatitis C and B. Cookers should NEVER be shared or reused. Two types of cookers/spoons are available through the Exchange Works program
- Always heat drug mixture until it bubbles to kill bacteria. Allow the mixture to cool, NEVER inject drugs when they are hot.

Sterile Water

- Use sterile water for mixing up your drug solution.
- Non-sterile water/fluids (e.g., Tap water, puddles, saliva, urine, bottled water) can lead to bacterial infections.
- Hepatitis C and HIV have been detected in used water. Hepatitis C can survive in water for 3 weeks. Sharing, mixing, or using rinsing water is associated with HIV and hepatitis B and C transmission.

Filters

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- Filters are used on the tip of the needle to prevent debris (dirt, large particles) from being drawn up into the syringe.
- Use a new filter with every injection.
- Avoid cigarette filters as some have glass fibers. Injecting these fibers can damage your veins and heart.
- Household items like tampons and Q-tips are not safe because the cotton is loose and long strands can be injected through the needle. Reusing or sharing filters has been associated with HIV, hepatitis B and C transmission.

Ascorbic Acid/Vitamin C

- Vitamin C should only be used to dissolve substance that come in a solid form, like crack cocaine and brown/black tar heroin.
- Vitamin C can be harmful if misused, like using too much or when not needed.
- Using household items/common acidifiers (e.g., Lemon juice, vinegar) may cause other health-related harms like bacterial infections and are not recommended.
 - Any acid injected into the bloodstream may lead to vessel irritation and possible local vein damage. Ascorbic acid (vitamin C) is less irritating to veins than citric acid.
- Do not drink the Vitamin C from harm reduction programs, it is intended for dissolving drugs for injection only.
- Ask clients if they need ascorbic acid to dissolve the drug they are using.

Tourniquets/Ties

- Using a tourniquet or “tie” helps to make veins easier to find.
 - Belts, bandanas, condoms, wires, ropes, or shoelaces are not elastic enough for a quick release and can lead to trauma of the skin and veins.
 - Do not leave the tourniquet on while you inject or after injection.
 - A tourniquet is considered unclean and needs to be replaced when:
 - There is visible blood and/or dirt.
 - It has ever been used by someone else.
 - There is a loss of elasticity.

Flagging

- "Flag" or pull back on the plunger before you inject to be sure that your needle is in a vein.
- Blood will come back into the barrel when you flag; it will be dark red.
 - If the blood is bright red and frothy, PULL OUT and apply pressure to the site; you are in an artery.
- Release the tie once you know you are in a vein **before you inject**.

Needle Disposal

- Whenever possible use a needle disposal container from Exchange Works
- A pop or other hard plastic container with a lid can also be used to store used needles. Put needles and syringes needle end down in the container.
- Bring your container of used needles to Exchange Works for disposal.
- 24-hour disposable containers are available in Huntsville, Barrie, Orillia.

- Never flush a used syringe down the toilet. They can clog pipes and injure the person who will need to remove them.
- **Never leave a needle where someone else could use it or get poked.**

3. Share the following about safe smoking information if appropriate

DO NOT SHARE YOUR GLASS STEM, Bowl kit OR MOUTHPIECE

Equipment is considered unsafe and needs to be replaced when:

- The pipe and/or the mouthpiece have been used by anyone else.
- The pipe is scratched, chipped, or cracked.
- The mouthpiece or stem is burnt.
- The screen shrinks and is loose in the stem.
- even the smallest trace of blood is on it.

Smoking crack cocaine or methamphetamine with self-made pipes (e.g., Glass bottles, beverage cans, plastic bottles) can lead to injury and burns to mouth, lips and hands, inhalation of toxic vapours and should be discouraged.

Studies identify sharing pipes and mouth pieces as a risk for HIV, hepatitis B and C transmission.

Stem Kits

Mouthpiece

- This piece of plastic is placed at the end of the glass stem where you put your lips.

tStem

- Intended for smoking drugs in rock form such as crack cocaine.
- A long thin Pyrex glass tube.
- Put the plastic mouthpiece on one end of the tube.
- The rock of crack is placed at the other end on top of the screens.
- When heated the smoke from the rock is inhaled through the glass stem.

Brass Screens

- 5 brass screens in a pack. Roll the 5 screens together.
- Place them at the other end of the glass stem.
- Make sure that they are packed tightly with the push stick, so the screens stay in place and don't get caught in your throat.
- Heating the brass screens will make them easier to work with.
- Use new brass screens each time when smoking substances.

Push Stick

- Use the push stick to mold the screens, push the screens to one end of the glass stem, and remove the screens.

Alcohol Swabs

- Use these to clean your glass stem and mouthpiece. Clean them before each use.

Disposal of the glass stem.

- Put your used glass stem with the mouthpiece in a biohazard container, can or jar and bring it back to a Needle Exchange location.

Bowl kits

- Used for smoking crystal methamphetamine or other drugs that produce vapour when heated.

Mouthpiece

- This piece of plastic is placed at the end of the glass stem where you put your lips.

Bowl pipe

- a long Pyrex tube with a round bulb at the end for the liquid substance

Alcohol Swabs

- Use these to clean your glass stem and mouthpiece. Clean them every time that you use your stem.

Disposal of the glass stem.

- Put your used glass stem with the mouthpiece in a biohazard container, can or jar and bring it back to a Needle Exchange location.

Other supplies available

Straws

- Paper straws are used for snorting powdered drugs or inhaling vapour from heating drugs on foil.
- Makeshift items or plastic straws can cause scratches and tears to the inside of the nose.
- Paper straws are for personal use only and should never be shared.
- A new straw should be used each time.
- Dispose of used straws safely.

Foil

- Foil sheets are used to smoke/vape drugs that produce inhalable vapours when heated.
- Smoking drugs from foil can prevent harms associated with injecting, **HOWEVER IT DOES NOT REDUCE THE RISK OF OVERDOSE**
- Foil provided by NEP sites is made specifically for smoking drugs. It is stronger and thicker than general household foil and it has no oil coating, so no need to burn it before using.
- Foil can be cut into multiple pieces as preferred or folded for a thicker surface.
- Foil can also be formed into a pipe. Foil pipes are safer than makeshift devices and can reduce the chance of cutting your lips.
- Used foil should be disposed of safely.

BZK Wipes

- BZK Wipes are antiseptic towelettes for cleaning hands when soap and water are not available.
- BZK wipes can also assist with wound care and general hygiene.
- BZK wipes are not a replacement for alcohol swabs when preparing a site for injection.
- BZK wipes are single use and should not be shared or re-used.
- BZK wipes are for external use only.
- Do not use BZK wipes if there is skin irritation including: redness, drying, swelling or cracking.
- Used BZK wipes should be disposed of safely.

4. Share Other Important Messages as needed:

Smoking, snorting, or swallowing a drug is safer than injecting to reduce your risk of infections and the developing abscesses. Risk of overdose remains high when using illicit substances.

Medical Attention

- Develop fever, vomiting, chills and a tired feeling. You may be developing an infection, seek medical care right away.
- Injection site is red, swollen, and hot to touch. You may have an abscess. Infections like these are serious and must be treated right away.

TESTING

- If client has ever had unprotected sex or shared any drug related equipment, they may want to consider having testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and blood borne infection (BBIs) with a health care provider or at the local Sexual Health Clinic.

TREATMENT

- Provide a copy of the treatment card if information is requested. Cards can be ordered on the Exchange Works supply order form.

NALOXONE PROGRAM

- A harm reduction initiative that distributes Naloxone kits to people who use opioids and their friends/family. The purpose of the naloxone program is to put Naloxone into the hands of people who use opioids in Simcoe Muskoka so that they can use it in the event of an overdose.
- Naloxone reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.
- Naloxone acts quickly, within 1 to 5 minutes.
- People who are distributed the kit will be encouraged to call 911, administer nasal naloxone, start chest compressions and/or rescue breathing when signs of an overdose are evident.
- Naloxone is a very safe drug. It only works to block the effects of opioids in the brain and cannot get a person high.
- Needle exchange clients who use opioids and family/friends can get a naloxone kit by calling the health unit 705-721-7520 or dropping into a health unit office/clinic. Kits are also available at participating pharmacies and other community outreach programs.

Related Policies

- EW – Staff Training and Anonymity
- EW - Documentation
- EW – Media Inquiries
- EW – Needle Stick Injuries
- EW – Provision and Return of Supplies
- EW – Staff Safety

Final Approval Signature: _____

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2016.07.06

References:

Canadian Nurses Association (2018) Joint position statement, Harm Reduction and Substance use; retrieved from www.cna-aiic.ca/-/cna/page-content/pdf-en/joint_position_statement_harm_reduction_and_substance_use.pdf

Canadian Mental Health Association (2022) Harm Reduction; retrieved from [Harm Reduction \(cmha.ca\)](http://cmha.ca)