

# facts

Condoms are essential for ANY type of sexual contact - whether vaginal or anal as they act as a barrier and prevent the exchange of body fluids. Oral sex has a lower risk, but must be avoided if either partner has a gum infection, ulcers or sores. Do not share sex 'toys'.

When a new sexual relationship begins, even if both partners intend to remain monogamous, both partners should be tested for HIV (AIDS), and then continue to use condoms until another test in 6 months time returns a negative result.

In long-term relationships, it is recommended that condoms should ALWAYS be used if either partner has been or is still injecting drugs (even once), or has other sexual partners (even if the possibility of infection from these seems remote). Your local Family Planning and Sexual Health Clinics can offer advice and information on safe sex and sexual health matters: See the **FACT SHEET** No.1 **Contacts** for services.

## Contacts

**For more information contact 1300 368 186**

**Family Drug Support**

**PO Box 226**

**Willoughby NSW 2068**

**Phone (02) 9798 0001**

**Fax (02) 9798 0005**

**www.fds.org.au**



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## Infectious Disease Prevention - Safe Injecting & Safe Sex Practices

### Diseases

Diseases of most concern in relation to injecting drug use are the HIV (AIDS) virus and Hepatitis C. Using safe injecting practice as an injecting drug user and having sex as safely as possible is the only real protection against these diseases and infections.

Australia leads the world in prevention of HIV (AIDS) transmission in injecting drug users, mainly due to community education and adoption of harm-minimisation policies. Less than 2% of Australian injecting drug users are HIV positive.

Abstinence is one form of safety but when this is not possible then knowledge of safe practices can assist in reducing the risk of exposure to users and their families. Further information about HIV (AIDS) can be obtained from the Australian Intravenous League Member Organisations. Check their website at [www.aivl.org.au](http://www.aivl.org.au). In New South Wales, NUAA (NSW Users and Aids Association) offers advice and information on injecting practices and safe drug use, and on living with HIV (AIDS): Contact them on (02) 9369 3455. **FACT SHEET** No.1 **Contacts** for other states support services.

However when drug users spend some time on the streets they may also be exposed to other infectious diseases (not as deadly) but still a contributor to ill health eg: such as scabies, body lice and nits. Your Public Health Unit can advise on treatment and eradication of these. See the **FACT SHEET** No.1 **Contacts** for other states support services.

### Hepatitis C (HCV)

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a blood-borne virus that affects the liver and in some people can lead to serious liver damage and even cancer of the liver. The liver is the organ responsible for cleaning the blood and storing nutrients needed by the body, such as proteins, carbohydrates and fats. HCV exists as a number of different strains or types and is able to survive for a long time outside the body or the blood. A tiny amount of invisible or microscopic blood is enough to transmit the virus and it is therefore easy to transmit between people. Current estimates are that Hepatitis C infects over 50% of injecting drug users in Australia. The Hepatitis C Council of New South Wales: (02) 9332 1599 or freecall 1800 803 990 can offer advice and information on injecting practices and safe drug use, treatment and on living with HCV.

Hep C Symptoms and effects will vary depending on the strain, the user's health and state of their immune system. A person can contract multiple infections of Hep C, each one increasing the risk of serious illness. Over time Hep C infection may cause levels of liver damage and symptoms ranging from mild to serious. About a quarter of those infected will suffer liver damage (cirrhosis) after 20 years and there is the possibility that 10% overall will progress to liver failure or cancer, but treatment outcomes are improving from further research.

## How do I reduce my risk of contacting HepC or other blood transmissible diseases?

Measures aimed to protect against Hep C will also protect against other blood to blood transmissible diseases.

Infected users can avoid transmitting HCV to other users, friends or family. Being diagnosed with HCV is no excuse for not taking precautions - but it does take a bit of effort and organisation and following of some important rules:

### SAFE INJECTING PRACTICES

The most important rules are:

- NEVER SHARE ANY EQUIPMENT. This includes syringes, swabs, cotton wool, and filters. Even someone's finger on a vein or a tourniquet can transmit the Hepatitis C virus
- EVERY TIME use a clean syringe, sterile water, filter, cotton wool, spoon and antiseptic swab (if re-use is essential, the fit should be sterilised if possible). Users should have their own equipment such as tourniquets, spoons etc which they keep sterile, and never share with ANYONE
- WASH THE surface or TABLE being used with diluted bleach (if possible)
- Wash your hands with soap BEFORE and AFTER INJECTING and before and after touching anybody else
- SWAB the area of SKIN with an antiseptic swab before injecting
- APPLY PRESSURE to the vein AFTERWARDS using a clean cotton-wool ball (not a swab, as the antiseptic can stop the blood from clotting)
- ALWAYS USE CLEAN injecting EQUIPMENT 'fits' which you can get from your local needle and syringe programs or pharmacy. See the **FACT SHEET No.1 Contacts** for reference

In country areas sources of clean injecting equipment 'fits' (or indeed any drug resources) may be difficult to find. Contact ADIS: Alcohol and Drugs Information Service: 1800 422 599 for more information about your area. Advice can be obtained from needle and syringe outlets as well as drug user services.

### Disposal of used injecting equipment

- Dispose of the used equipment 'fit', cotton wool, swabs etc cleanly and carefully in a 'sharps container' (equipment disposal containers) where there is no danger of anyone else coming into contact with it
- Pick the syringe up by the barrel - firmly to avoid dropping it - never by the tip
- Never re-cap or bend the needle, as these are common ways to sustain needle-stick injury
- Whenever possible use a 'sharps container'. These can be obtained from needle and syringe programs or some pharmacies

### Other things to avoid

For non-injecting drug users the risks of infection are somewhat lower, but are by no means non-existent. There is risk of Hep C transmission through any form of blood to blood contact, for example sharing the same device for snorting coke or speed, or for anal insertion of drugs (known as 'shafting', 'squirting' or 'shelving') or sharing toothbrushes or razors. Household transmission and sexual transmission of the Hep C virus is rare. For up to date information contact the Hepatitis C Council, ADIS or your local Area Health Service. See **Fact Sheet No. 1 - Contacts**.

People may also have concerns about things such as how to clean up body fluids, when someone is ill eg: vomiting, bleeding from a cut, diarrhoea etc. It is generally always good to wear disposable gloves and clean the surface with bleach. Wash laundry items in hot water using detergent or disinfectant as appropriate. The Clinical Nurse Specialist at your Area Alcohol and Drug Unit or Public Health Unit should be able to advise you, should you have any concerns. See the **FACT SHEET No.1 Contacts** for reference.

### Safe Sex

Safe sex practices and sexual health are important for all members of the community and are even more essential to maintain if you are using drugs or working in the sex industry.

HIV (AIDS) transmission rates in the homosexual community have fallen and are relatively stable due to the adoption of safe sex practices. The heterosexual community, however, has lagged behind in the adoption of safe sex practices.

Teenagers are a group of great concern as they often think they're invincible and that nothing will happen to them. It's important to emphasise to this group that anyone is at risk of contracting or transmitting blood-borne viruses and other infections unless they practice safe sex and low risk drug use.

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