



HIV/HCV & Safer Injection Practices For People Who Use Drugs Fact Sheet

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a blood-borne pathogen that weakens the immune system.

HIV can only be transmitted through the following fluids: blood, breastmilk, vaginal Fluid, rectal Fluid, semen (including pre-cum).

There is **no cure** and **no vaccine**. Once someone has HIV it is for life. However, HIV treatment that is adhered to can suppress the virus to an undetectable level, which will increase quality of life for the seropositive person, and greatly reduce the risk of transmission.

Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)

Risk of Transmission:

Fluid + Route + Activity = Risk of Transmission

HCV: Hepatitis C Virus

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a blood-borne pathogen that harms the liver. The liver breaks down toxins, aids in digestion, filters blood, metabolises drugs, and more, making it an important organ in the human body.

HCV has a **cure**, but **no vaccine**, and can only be transmitted through blood.

Many people can live 20-30 years without any negative effects from the virus, and still transmit it to other people, making it important to get tested regularly.

Harm Reduction

The harm reduction information included on this fact sheet is offered as a public health service. Its purpose is not to encourage or condone the use or possession of illegal drugs. It is to help people make safe choices in their use of drugs that will reduce the spread of Hep C and HIV.

One of the best ways for people who inject drugs to avoid infection by blood-borne diseases like Hep C and HIV is to use new sterile equipment (that has never been used before) every time. This equipment includes but is not limited to: syringes, needles, tourniquets, cookers, filters, water and alcohol swabs. All supplies required for safe injection can be procured at Northreach and in participating pharmacies.

Steps to Safer Injection

People who inject drugs can take steps to reduce the chances that they will either contract a blood-borne pathogen or pass it on to others if they are already infected. Safe injection steps can be divided into five(5) distinct stages: 1. Plan ahead 2. Preparation 3. Mixing 4. Injecting and 5. Cleaning up.

Disposing of all used equipment, including needles and filters, will prevent other people from coming into contact with contaminated supplies which will reduce the risk of transmitting blood-borne infections. Sharps containers should be used to dispose of all paraphernalia.

Safer Injection Supplies

Needles and syringes are not all the same. In general, the thickness of the needle should match the thickness of the vein the person is injecting into. Using needles that are too small or too big can cause more bleeding and lead to more opportunities for infection.

All information obtained from and for further information go to: www.catie.ca