

Hep C factsheets

Disposing of fits



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- use their own new equipment for each hit.
- not share any equipment with anyone else - eg. water, filters, tourniquet, swabs, etc.
- not let their blood come into contact with anyone else's.
- not let anyone else's blood come into contact with theirs.
- not help others, or let them help you unless hands have been washed (there is no absolute guarantee that washing hands and surfaces will stop transmission but it will lower the chances of it happening).
- rinse their fit out with cold water in case it has to be used again as a last resort.
- dispose of used equipment safely (see following).

Introduction

Harm minimisation involves three strategies about drug use: supply reduction, demand reduction and harm reduction. This factsheet is related to harm reduction - which acknowledges that some people will choose to use drugs and aims to help them do so more safely.

This factsheet is about preventing transmission of bloodborne viruses through avoiding blood-to-blood contact when handling or disposing of used needles and syringes (fits). It relates to everyone who injects - heroin, speed and ice injectors, body builders who use steroids or people who inject methadone or prescription medicines.

In addition to safe disposal of used equipment (see later), people who inject drugs should:

- wash their hands before and after a hit.
- wipe down the surface where they are mixing up, such as a table.

How to safely dispose of used injecting equipment

Used equipment left lying around the house or anywhere in public can cause needlestick injuries and media coverage of this projects a poor image of drug users. Needle and syringe program (NSP) outlets can supply disposal containers and help dispose of fits and other equipment safely. The containers are especially designed to hold used fits. They are called sharps bins and are the same as those used in hospitals and clinics.

Disarming of fits by breaking or bending is not a safe practice. After use, it's best to drop them, uncapped, straight into a sharps container to dispose of them.

If people get their fits in a fit pack, disposing of them is simple - just put them back in the non-return part of the fit pack. Once they are filled with used fits, fit packs and sharps bins should be returned to an NSP outlet and swapped for new ones.

What to do if you find a used fit

If you come across a used fit and do not feel comfortable about handling it safely, ring the *Needle Clean Up Hotline* on 1800 633 353 (24 hrs). They will organise for the fit to be removed within 48 hours.

If you do feel okay about handling the discarded fit, follow these steps:

1. Get a strong plastic, puncture proof container with a screw top lid. Never hold the container while you are handling the fit. Place the container on the ground next to the discarded fit.
2. Pick up the fit by the plastic plunger end, away from the needle point. Even if the plastic cap is nearby, do not put the cap back on.
3. Put the fit into the container.
4. Screw on the container lid, tightly.
5. Ring the *Needle Clean Up Hotline* on 1800 633 353 (24 hrs). They will come and pick up the container. Alternatively, you can take the container to an NSP outlet or put it into a safe disposal street bin.

Do not put fits down toilets, drains or dispose of them loose in household waste.

Tell children they should never pick up fits but to always call an adult for help.

Is it illegal to store used fits in the house or to take them to an NSP?

In NSW it is legal to possess fits but a used fit may be used as evidence of self administration of an illegal drug.

Needlestick injuries

Health care or emergency services workers should contact the NSW *Needlestick Injury Hotline* on 1800 804 823 (free-call, 24hrs, 7 days). This is an information, support and referral service for health care workers, paramedical workers and police throughout NSW who sustain a needlestick injury and/or occupational exposure to blood and body fluids.

Members of the public who believe they have experienced a needlestick injury should see a GP (doctor).

Further information

Local NSPs are the best source of information about provision of new injecting equipment and safe disposal. For the contact details of local NSPs, phone the Alcohol & Drug Information Service (ADIS) on 1800 422 599 (NSW regional) or 9331 2111 (Sydney).

For general information about hep C and needlestick injury, people can phone the *Hep C Helpline* on 02 9332 1599 (Sydney) or 1800 803 990 (freecall NSW regional).

For information about safer drug use practices, people can contact the NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) on 02 8354 7300 (Sydney) or 1800 644 413 (NSW regional).

If you want to phone and speak to the above services in a language other than English, call a telephone interpreter on 13 1450. Ask for an interpreter and when he/she comes on line, ask them to call the number you want. You will then be able to speak via the interpreter.

To find the Aboriginal Medical Service closest to you, contact the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW on 02 9212 4777 or visit www.ahmrc.org.au

Also see:

Harm minimisation (factsheet)

Hep C Prevention (factsheet)

NSP: Your Questions Answered (booklet)

WHO TO CALL if you find any needles in a public place (postcard) www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Community/documents/Safety/SyringeFlyer.pdf

- This factsheet was developed by the Hepatitis C Council of NSW.