

INJECTING ICE IN THE COUNTRY Healthier Approaches

SAFER INJECTING AND HARM REDUCTION

Your role in promoting safer injecting messages and harm reduction supports the health and wellbeing of each client and the wider community.

Ice can be used in a number of ways – ingesting, snorting, smoking and injecting – all of which have risks. People who are injecting face the highest risks.

It may be difficult to influence many of your clients' behaviours, however your reinforcement of safer injecting practices can reduce injecting-related harms. Also, your communication about safe disposal of injecting equipment reduces overall risks for the community.

It is important that you promote to clients that they always take more equipment for nights, weekends or during other periods when the service will not be in operation, or to cover unplanned use by themselves or someone else.

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Background

Injecting has a series of well-known risks that can be protected against - including the transmission of blood-borne viruses such as HIV and hepatitis C.

These risks may be new to some clients, particularly if they do not have a history of injecting and have started injecting as part of progression of their ice use. Alternatively they may be aware of risks of contracting hepatitis C, but not HIV.

People who inject ice have an increased risk of bacterial and fungal infections. Specific conditions include:

Bacterial endocarditis - damages heart valves and can cause heart failure.

Abscesses - collection of pus under the skin that can lead to blood poisoning.

Cellulitis - skin infection that causes the infected area to become hot, red, and very painful.

Thrombosis - a blood clot inside a blood vessel, obstructing the flow of blood through the circulatory system.

Septicaemia - a serious blood infection caused by bacteria entering the body at the injecting site.

Injecting risks related to ice use

The effects of ice and symptoms of intoxication present a unique set of risks.

Over-confidence

The effects of ice often give people who use it a sense of boldness, impulsiveness and invincibility. This can make them over-confident, complacent and more likely to ignore the dangers associated with injecting - increasing the risk of vein damage and transmitting blood-borne viruses.

Veins shrink

The effect of ice on the veins makes them shrink (vasoconstriction), meaning it can be harder for people who inject ice to find a vein. This increases the risk of missed hits, vein damage and the transmission of blood-borne viruses. People who use caffeine and/or nicotine in the hours before they inject ice are at greater risk.

Vein damage

People who are intoxicated on ice risk damaging their veins due to hand tremors or blurred vision while trying to inject. People who inject ice are also likely to inject repeatedly during one session, so they need to be well equipped with lots of sterile equipment from their NSP.

NSP staff should remind clients that they are better to be over-supplied than under-equipped. To be on the safe side, always recommend clients take more equipment than they need, just in case.

Sharing

Sharing of injecting equipment is a high-risk behaviour that can occur, especially when people are highly stimulated and impulsive. The sharing can be intended or accidental. Remind your clients to never share used equipment, particularly when a number of people are injecting together. This includes all injecting equipment including water, spoons, swabs, filter, tourniquets, needles and syringes. Let your clients know that cross-contamination can easily occur so extra vigilance should be taken by making sure they have plenty of sterile equipment.

Advice to help clients reduce risks of infection and injury

- Wash down preparation surfaces with soapy water.
- Wash fingers and hands thoroughly before injecting - if there's no sterile water, use clean swabs.
- Wash the injection site or wipe the site with a swab, once in one direction.
- Use sterile water.
- Filter the mix.
- Do not share any injecting equipment (needles, syringes, filter, water, spoons and tourniquets).

Summary

NSP clients face a range of injecting risks. Promoting the use of sterile equipment is at the core of NSP work, as is the promotion of safe disposal of used equipment. Understanding vein care and injecting-related injuries will increase your capacity to have harm reduction conversations with your clients.

There is one area where you can really help educate clients - whenever possible, reinforce the message to never share used equipment.

A good approach is to gently reinforce the risks of poor injecting behaviours, and remind clients that they are better to be over-supplied than under-equipped. Offer to pack the equipment in a bag so that clients can stock up on supplies without drawing attention to themselves.

Please consider contacting your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation for additional services and supports for your Aboriginal clients, or visit www.vaccho.org.au.

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