

INJECTING ICE IN THE COUNTRY Healthier Approaches

SAFER INJECTING AND HARM REDUCTION FOR ABORIGINAL CLIENTS

NSPs perform a crucial role in promoting a message of good vein care and safer injecting practices.

Communicating harm reduction advice supports the health and wellbeing of each client and the wider community.

While it may be difficult to influence many of your clients' behaviours - one opportunity to positively influence them is in reinforcing safe injecting practices to reduce injecting-related risks.

The term Aboriginal is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

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What is a harm reduction approach?

Harm reduction refers to policies, programs and practices that aim to reduce the harms associated with the use of drugs. The focus is on the prevention of harm, rather than on the prevention of drug use itself, and the focus on people who continue to use drugs. Harm reduction may be inclusive of abstinence, where abstinence is actively chosen by individuals.

Background

A number of indicators point to the increasing level of injecting among people who use ice in Australia. There has also been a shift towards ice in Aboriginal people who inject drugs.

As opposed to the other methods of using ice (all of which have their risks), injecting has a series of well-known risks, 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

Over-confidence

The intense stimulant effect of ice can make people who use it feel invincible and impulsive. This can make them over-confident, and more likely to ignore the dangers associated with injecting - putting themselves and others at increased risk of transmitting blood-borne viruses.

Veins shrink

Ice makes veins constrict (or shrink), making it harder to find a vein for injection and increasing the risk of missed hits, vein damage and the transmission of viruses. Caffeine and nicotine also constrict veins and are commonly used by people who inject ice.

Vein damage

Intoxicated ice users are at risk of damaging their veins due to things like hand tremors or blurred vision. People who inject ice are also likely to inject repeatedly during one session, so they need to be well equipped with plenty of sterile equipment from their NSP.

Sharing

Evidence suggests that the rates of sharing injecting equipment are higher in Aboriginal communities. This may be due to a number of factors, including the lack of access to NSP services and the equipment that they provide. The sharing can be intended or accidental. Remind your clients to never share used equipment, including water, spoons, swabs, filter, tourniquets, needles and syringes. It is not easy to influence injecting practices, but being clear with clients about the risks of sharing is vital. Always encourage people who visit the service to take more equipment than they need to cover unplanned use. Tell your clients that **if they are going to share, make it sterile equipment, not infections.**

Practical 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 are subject to a range of injecting risks. Promoting the use of sterile equipment and safe disposal of used equipment is critical.

A good approach is to gently reinforce the risks of poor injecting practices, and the opportunity that clients have to protect their health by following some relatively simple steps. Remind clients that they are better to take more equipment than they think they need - just in case.

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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