

INJECTING ICE IN THE COUNTRY Healthier Approaches

IMPACTS OF ICE ON THE BODY

Poor health and substance use can often go hand-in-hand. The greater the level and duration of use, the greater the likelihood of poor physical health for your clients. While using ice can have a range of impacts on the health and wellbeing of your clients, there are well known impacts on the body - you may be in a position to refer clients to health services that are offered to address these health concerns.

penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry



The teeth

Ice use has a direct impact on oral health. Ice suppresses the production of saliva and the dry mouth can cause bacteria to build up and rot teeth. While ice doesn't actually corrode teeth, lack of organised thinking often results in poor self-care including poor diet and dental hygiene.

A symptom of ice use is jaw clenching, due to the person being highly stimulated. Repeated and intense clenching can result in heavy grinding and dislodgment of teeth.

Tooth decay can be a very painful and uncomfortable condition. The best way to protect your clients' health and wellbeing is by promoting local dental clinics.

Poor oral hygiene can also lead to infections in the teeth entering the bloodstream through the gum tissue. Once in the bloodstream the infection can travel to the heart and infect the lining of the heart - a condition known as endocarditis (see below).

The heart

Heart problems are not uncommon for people that use ice due to the intense stimulant effect of the drug. Cardiovascular complications are a common cause of death for people who use ice. The evidence suggests that the ongoing stress that taking ice has on the cardiovascular system can weaken the heart and affect blood vessels in a way that may increase the risk of heart failure.

What is endocarditis?

- Endocarditis is an infection of the lining of the heart or the inner membrane of the heart.
 - People who have pre-existing heart disease are at increased risk of developing endocarditis.
 - Ice use can increase the risk of endocarditis because bacteria may be introduced into the bloodstream via infections in the mouth and/or infected injecting sites.
-

The liver

A healthy liver is essential for the body's metabolism and general good function. Liver functioning is compromised once the body's temperature reaches 40 degrees. Prolonged use of ice can cause overheating. This change in liver function can allow dangerous amounts of the chemical ammonia to reach the brain, possibly resulting in damage which impairs brain function and memory.

Your work to promote safer injecting practices is vital in preventing the spread of blood-borne viruses, some of which have damaging effects on the liver.

Let your clients know that new, highly effective treatments are available for hepatitis C with very minimal side effects.

Summary

NSP staff are well placed to identify and support clients' overall health issues. You can help support your clients' physical wellbeing if you are aware of the main impacts of ice on the mouth, heart and liver. It is important to know what health services are available locally so that you're in a position to offer referrals to relevant services.

Due to drug dependence, stigma and discrimination, people who inject drugs are often poorly connected to health care services. A casual inquiry about how your clients are travelling can open up a wider conversation about health. A good starting point is being equipped with some information about the common health impacts of ice and what to look out for.

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.

penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry

Produced by



PENINGTON
INSTITUTE

With the collaboration of



Funded by

