

Dirty Hit

“Dirty hit” is a catch-all term for when you’ve injected something that makes you feel sick. It’s often because there was something nasty in the hit, like bacteria, fungus or some type of germ or dirt.

Injecting can cause infections

The main infections to watch out for when injecting are:

- Bacteria from dirt
- Blood-borne viruses such as hep C and HIV

Some infections only affect one area or body part but can spread and cause other infections. Other infections affect your whole body.

It is good to know what to do to reduce risk of infections and what to look out for if you get an infection.

Don’t ignore the signs of infection and don’t assume that infections will get better by themselves. Infections can be extremely quick acting and minutes can make a difference.

You should see a doctor urgently. The sooner you get an infection treated, the better the chance that things will go well.



**Between us,
sterile equipment
helps stop infection.**

Stock up from your nearest fit shop
and avoid the risks of sharing.



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There are things you can do to reduce the risk of infections:

- Always use new sterile injecting equipment
- Find a clean space to mix up on or you can use the paper bag that your fits came in to create a clean surface
- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after injecting
- Don't forget to clean your injecting site too
- If you don't have soap and water, you can use swabs to clean your skin
- Don't share any injecting equipment
- Don't lick the needle as there are bacteria in your mouth that can cause fungal infections if injected
- Use sterile filters to try to get rid of contaminants
- Sterile water ampoules are the safest option
- It's not advisable to use commercially bottled water for injecting, especially if you have drunk from the bottle. Yes, even if it's only you who has drunk from the bottle, there are bacteria and germs in our mouths that are harmless when swallowed but if injected can cause serious illness

Make sure that everything you need is within reach before you inject: new sterile syringes, new sterile water (or cooled boiled water in a clean glass) and new swabs.

Washing your hands and swabbing

There are a few steps that you need to make sure you keep doing when injecting.

Thanks to COVID, we are all now better at washing our hands. And we know that you need to wash your hands for 20 seconds.

Washing your hands helps to get rid of bacteria and dirt and prevents the transmission of blood-borne viruses such as hep C and HIV.

It is always best to wash your hands and injecting site with warm soapy water.

You should rinse well with clean water and if you can, dry your hands and arms with a paper towel.

If you can't access soap and water use alcohol swabs to clean your fingers and injecting site. Use as many swabs as necessary to clean all of the dirt off then use a clean swab and swipe in one direction to remove any traces of dirt.

When we swab back and forth or in a circular motion, the dirt just ends up being moved around. That's why it's important to use a clean swab for that final swipe in one direction to actually remove the dirt.

Infections can result in:

1. ABSCESSSES

An abscess is a collection of pus which can form anywhere in the body.

Most abscesses that affect people who inject are in the skin or soft tissue where someone has injected. They can be swollen and painful and can have a foul smell if pus leaks out.

If untreated an abscess can:

- Become inflamed
- Lead to ulcers
- Spread infection (including to the bone)
- Cause blood poisoning

How abscesses form

Abscesses are often caused by a missed hit, germs, bacteria or contaminates/insoluble matter in the hit.

You risk an abscess when you:

- Don't wash your hands
- Inject pills that haven't been filtered properly
- Reuse or share fits
- Don't clean the injection site properly
- Miss your vein

Abscesses are a serious health concern and can get worse very quickly. They need urgent medical attention for lancing (draining) and medication. You should never squeeze or try to pop an abscess yourself because you risk spreading the infection into your blood.

2. CELLULITIS

Cellulitis is a skin and soft tissue infection that causes the infected area to become hot, red and very painful. It's caused by bacteria or irritants getting under the skin. It may start at an injection site but can spread. If untreated, cellulitis can develop into other, more serious conditions.

Possible signs of these infections can include:

- Redness or heat
- Swelling
- Tenderness or pain
- Pus formation

If you think you might have cellulitis you should seek medical advice immediately. Cellulitis can be treated with antibiotics.

3. SEPTICAEMIA

Septicaemia means blood poisoning and is very serious. It is caused by bacteria getting into your blood stream.

Symptoms include:

- High fever
- Dizziness, light-headedness or faintness

If untreated, septicaemia can cause potentially fatal complications. You must seek medical treatment.

Septicaemia is treated with antibiotics.

4. BACTERIAL ENDOCARDITIS

Bacterial endocarditis is an infection of the valves and inner lining of the heart and can cause heart failure and even death.

Symptoms include:

- Chest pain
- Fever, chills or night sweats
- Aching
- Persistent cough
- Shortness of breath

If you have any questions or concerns about a possible infection, speak with the workers at your local fit shop.