

Injection Drug Use and HIV Risk



Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug injection equipment (for example, cookers) puts people at risk for getting or transmitting HIV and other infections.



About 1 in 10 new HIV diagnoses in the United States are attributed to injection drug use or male-to-male sexual contact *and* injection drug use.*

Risk of HIV

The risk for getting or transmitting HIV is very high if an HIV-negative person uses injection equipment that someone with HIV has used. This is because the needles, syringes, or other injection equipment may have blood in them, and blood can carry HIV.

1/160

An HIV-negative person has a 1 in 160 chance of getting HIV every time they use a needle that has been used by someone with HIV.

#2

Sharing syringes is the second-riskiest behavior for getting HIV. Receptive anal sex is the riskiest.

Substance use disorder can also increase the risk of getting HIV through sex. When people are under the influence of substances, they are more likely to have risky anal or vaginal sex, such as having sex without protection (like a condom or medicine to prevent or treat HIV), having sex with multiple partners, or trading sex for money or drugs.

Risk of Other Infections and Overdose

Sharing needles, syringes, or other injection equipment also puts people at risk for getting viral hepatitis. People who inject drugs (PWID) should talk to a doctor about getting a blood test for hepatitis B and C and getting vaccinated for hepatitis A and B.

In addition to being at risk for HIV and viral hepatitis, PWID can have other serious health problems, like skin infections and heart infections. People can also overdose or even die from having too many drugs or too much of one drug in their body or from products that may be mixed with the drugs without their knowledge (for example, fentanyl).

* Men who report both risk factors.

Reducing the Risk

The best way to reduce the risk of getting or transmitting HIV through injection drug use is to stop injecting drugs.

PWID can talk with a counselor or health care provider about treatment for drug addiction or substance use disorder, including medication-assisted treatment. People can find treatment centers through the locator tools on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website (www.samhsa.gov) or www.hiv.gov, or calling 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

People who continue injecting drugs should never share needles, syringes, or other injection equipment. Many communities have syringe services programs (SSPs) where people can get free sterile needles and syringes and safely dispose of used ones (www.cdc.gov/ssp/index.html). SSPs can also refer people to treatment for drug addiction or substance use disorder and help them get tested for HIV and hepatitis. People can contact their local health department or the North American Syringe Exchange Network (<https://nasen.org>) to find an SSP. Also, some pharmacies may sell needles and syringes without a prescription.

Other things people can do to lower their risk of getting or transmitting HIV, if they continue to inject drugs, include:

-  Using bleach to clean needles, syringes, cookers, and surfaces where drugs are prepared. This may reduce the risk of HIV and hepatitis C but doesn't eliminate it. Bleach can't be used to clean water or cotton. New, sterile water or cotton should be used each time.
-  Being careful not to get someone else's blood on their hands, needles, syringes, or other injection equipment.
-  Disposing of syringes safely after one use. People can put them in a sharps container or another container like an empty bleach or laundry detergent bottle. Keep all used syringes and needles away from other people.
-  Asking their health care provider about taking daily medicine to prevent HIV (called pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP) (www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html). People who take PrEP must take an HIV test before beginning PrEP and every 3 months while they're taking it.
-  Taking HIV medicine if they have HIV. People with HIV who take HIV medicine as prescribed and get and keep an undetectable viral load have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV *through sex*. Keeping an undetectable viral load likely reduces the risk of transmitting HIV through shared syringes or other injection equipment, but we don't know how much it reduces the risk. (www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/livingwithhiv/treatment.html).
-  Using a condom the right way every time they have anal or vaginal sex. Learn the right way to use a male condom (www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/male-condom-use.html).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

CDC: Drug Use and HIV

www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/drugs

CDC: Syringe Service Programs

www.cdc.gov/ssp/index.html

CDC: Overdose Prevention

www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/prevention/index.html

amfAR Opioid and Health Indicators Database

<http://opioid.amfar.org>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

GENERAL RESOURCES:

CDC-INFO

wwwn.cdc.gov/dcs/ContactUs/Form
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

CDC HIV Website

www.cdc.gov/hiv

Let's Stop HIV Together

www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether

HIV Risk Reduction Tool

wwwn.cdc.gov/hivrisk

Get Tested

<https://gettested.cdc.gov>

