



Filter distribution

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICE POLICIES to facilitate use of a sterile filter for each injection and reduce transmission of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis C (HCV), hepatitis B (HBV), and other pathogens, and to prevent other health complications, such as deep vein thrombosis (DVT), from the non-use and/or reuse of filters:

- Provide pre-packaged, sterile .22 µm filters that retain as little drug solution as possible in the quantities requested by clients with no limit on the number of filters provided per client, per visit
- Offer a filter with each needle provided
- Provide pre-packaged safer injection kits (needles/syringes, cookers, filters, ascorbic acid when required, sterile water for injection, alcohol swabs, tourniquets, condoms and lubricant) and also individual safer injection supplies concurrently
- Dispose of used filters and other injection equipment in accordance with local regulations for biomedical waste
- Educate clients about the risks associated with not using filters, sharing filters, making 'washes' from filters, the risks of bacterial contamination and DVT if a new filter is not used, and the correct single-person use of filters
- Educate clients about the proper disposal of used filters
- Provide multiple, convenient locations for safe disposal of used equipment

Key messages

Filters are used on the tips of the needles to prevent any undissolved particles of the drug, other debris (e.g., wax or talcum powder from crushed pills), and bacteria in the drug solution from being drawn up into the syringe and potentially injected. People sometimes use common items (e.g., cigarette filters) as filters for injection drug use, but these items may not be clean and will not filter out small organisms like bacteria. Sometimes people make 'washes' from used filters that have been collected because these filters may contain leftover drug solution. Sharing and reusing someone else's filter can put people at risk for infections like HIV, HCV, and HBV. Exact risk of transmission from using a used filter is not known. People may share filters more often than needles, so it is important for needle and syringe programs (NSPs) to educate clients about the potential risks of sharing and reusing filters.

Proper filter use is important to help prevent other health complications such as 'cotton fever', bacterial infection and abscesses, deep vein thrombosis (DVT), and talc deposits in the blood vessels (from crushed pills). Distributing filters of a small pore width is an important way for NSPs to reduce the risks associated with sharing or reusing filters and the risks associated with using large and non-sterile filters. While filters are becoming available from a growing number of NSPs in Canada, availability of filters may not be the same across the provinces/territories.