



Safer crack cocaine smoking equipment distribution

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICE POLICIES to facilitate smoking with a pipe – stem, mouthpiece, and screen – which is made from materials that are non-hazardous to health and have never been shared.

- Provide safer smoking equipment - stems, mouthpieces, screens, and push sticks - in the quantities requested by clients without requiring clients to return used equipment
- Make available both pre-packaged kits and individual pieces of equipment
- Integrate distribution of safer smoking equipment into existing harm reduction programs and services, including within needle and syringe programs (NSPs)
- Provide safe disposal options, including personal sharps containers, and encourage clients to return and/or properly dispose of used or broken pipes
- Provide other harm reduction supplies, such as condoms and lubricant, in the quantities requested by clients with no limit on the number provided
- Educate clients about safer use of equipment, safer smoking practices, the risks of sharing smoking supplies, and safer sex
- Educate clients about the proper disposal of used safer smoking equipment
- Provide multiple, convenient locations for safe disposal of used equipment

Equipment is considered unsafe and needs to be replaced when:

- The pipe and/or the mouthpiece have been used by anyone else
- The pipe is scratched, chipped or cracked
- The mouthpiece is burnt
- The screen shrinks and is loose in the stem

Key messages

Smoking crack cocaine puts people at higher risk for infection by human immunodeficiency virus

(HIV), hepatitis C (HCV), and other viruses and bacteria. Burns and lesions in the mouth (including lips), along with behaviours such as pipe (and mouthpiece) sharing and “shotgunning” can increase the risk of becoming infected or transmitting diseases. Crack cocaine can reduce the body’s ability to fight infections and levamisole, an adulterant sometimes found in crack cocaine, increases this risk. Viruses and bacteria may also survive on pipes and can be transmitted between people if pipes are shared. Using damaged (i.e., hazardous) pipes increases the risk for getting cuts to the lips and hands which can increase the chances of infection.

Studies on Canadian safer smoking equipment programs show that greater distribution of safer smoking supplies can reduce equipment sharing and increase service access for people who smoke crack cocaine. Offering safer smoking supplies beside safer injecting supplies can benefit people who may use multiple drugs in different ways. Distribution of supplies should be sensitive to client needs. For example, the length of mouthpieces should be decided with input from people who smoke crack cocaine. No limits should be placed on the quantities of supplies distributed.

Four items are considered to be “core” supplies for safer crack cocaine smoking:

- a) Heat-resistant glass (Pyrex or Borosilicate) stems
- b) Mouthpieces – Composed of food-grade material
- c) Push sticks – Composed of a non-scratching material
- d) Screens – High heat resistance, pliable, and with no chemical coatings.

Other supplies including condoms and lubricant may also be distributed for clients according to local needs.