



## Sterile water distribution

**RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICE POLICIES** to facilitate use of injection-grade sterile water for each injection and reduce transmission of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis C (HCV), hepatitis B (HBV), and other pathogens, and to prevent bacterial infection from the use of non-sterile water and other fluids:

- Provide single-use, 2 mL plastic vials with twist-off caps of sterile water for injection in the quantities requested by clients with no limit on the number of vials provided per client, per visit. If 2 mL vials of sterile water for injection are not available, distribute the smallest size of vial available.
- Offer a sterile water vial 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 empty water vials in accordance with local regulations for biomedical waste
- Educate clients about the HIV- and HCV-related risks associated with sharing mixing and rinse waters, the risks of using non-sterile water (such as tap, bottled, rain, puddle, and urinal water) and other fluids (such as saliva and urine), and the correct single-person use of mixing and rinse water
- Educate clients about the proper disposal of used water
- Provide multiple, convenient locations for safe disposal of used equipment

### Key messages

Drugs in powder, solid, or tablet form need to be mixed with water to make a solution that can be injected. Although we do not recommend the practice, people who inject drugs may also use water to rinse out their needles or other injection equipment. Sometimes people use non-sterile sources of water for these purposes which can lead to infection. Sharing and reusing someone else's mixing or rinse water can put people at risk for infections like HIV, HCV, and HBV. Exact risk of transmission from using a used water source is not known. People may share water sources 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 water.

Using sterile, injection-grade water is important to help prevent health complications such as bacterial infections and soft-tissue abscesses. Distributing water vials that are small enough (e.g., 2 mL) to promote single use is an important way for NSPs to reduce the risks associated with sharing or reusing mixing and rinse water and the risks associated with using non-sterile water. While water vials are becoming available from a growing number of NSPs in Canada, availability of water vials may not be the same across the provinces/territories. Most programs do not yet have access to supplies of 2 mL vials of sterile water for injection and instead distribute 3 mL vials of sterile water for inhalation. Although sterile water for injection is available in larger 10 mL vials, this format may not effectively reduce water sharing and reuse.