



Tourniquet distribution

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICE POLICIES to facilitate use of a clean tourniquet for each injection and reduce the potential for contamination of tourniquets with bacteria that can cause illness and abscesses (e.g., MRSA), and to reduce trauma to veins and blood circulation impairment:

A tourniquet is considered unclean and needs to be replaced when:

- There is visible blood and/or dirt
- It has ever been used by someone else
- There is a loss of elasticity
- Provide thin, pliable, easy-to-release, non-latex tourniquets with non-porous surfaces in the quantities requested by clients with no limit on the number of tourniquets provided per client, per visit
- Offer tourniquets 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 tourniquets and other injection equipment in accordance with local regulations for biomedical waste
- Educate clients about the risks of bacterial contamination and HIV- and HCV-related risks associated with the reuse and sharing of tourniquets, the risks of tissue and vein damage and blood circulation impairment if a clean, quick-release tourniquet is not used, and the correct single-person use of tourniquets
- Educate clients about the proper disposal of used tourniquets
- Provide multiple, convenient locations for safe disposal of used

Key messages

Tourniquets are used by some people who inject drugs to “tie off” the vein; they provide pressure which causes the preferred vein to swell and therefore help with injection. People sometimes use common items (e.g., rope, shoelaces, condoms) as tourniquets. However, these types of items may not be clean and may get splattered with blood. Also, these items may not be elastic enough for quick and easy release and may cause damage to skin/veins and blood circulation problems. Sharing and reusing someone else’s tourniquet may put people at risk for infections like human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C (HCV), but the risk of transmission may not be as high as with other injection-related equipment. Tourniquets may become contaminated with bacteria such as MRSA that can lead to abscesses and other infections. It is therefore important for needle and syringe programs (NSPs) to educate clients about the potential risks of sharing and reusing tourniquets.

Distributing thin, elastic, easy-to-release tourniquets with non-porous surfaces is an important way for NSPs to reduce the risks associated with sharing or reusing tourniquets and risks from using improper items as tourniquets. While tourniquets are becoming available from a growing number of NSPs in Canada, availability of tourniquets may not be the same across the provinces/territories.