



Injection-related complications – Prevention, assessment, and treatment

RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICE POLICIES to prevent, assess, and treat injection-related complications (IRCs):

- Educate clients about factors that can lead to IRCs and how to prevent and treat IRCs
- Develop and implement assessment, treatment, and referral protocols for IRCs
- Train staff at needle and syringe programs (NSPs) and satellite sites to identify and provide education about IRCs to clients
- Assess the prevalence of IRCs
- Evaluate and publish any IRC interventions undertaken

Key messages

People who inject drugs can experience numerous types of IRCs which NSPs can help to address through education and timely access to treatment. Many of the factors that can influence the risk for IRC development occur concurrently. A number of such factors include:

- Drug form (e.g., pills may contain bulking agents that can lodge under the skin)
- Contamination of drugs (e.g., contaminated with disease-causing bacteria)
- Contamination of injection equipment and skin
- Injection sites (e.g., the neck, groin, or hands)
- Methods of injecting (e.g., “skin popping” and “muscle popping”)
- Missed injections (e.g., intravenous injection intended, but vein was missed and injection occurred in surrounding tissue)
- Length and frequency of injection and assistance with injecting
- Social, demographic, and health factors (e.g., sex work, unstable housing, and hepatitis C infection)

Many people who inject drugs attempt to self-treat IRCs, but are unsuccessful at self-treatment. Providing clients with education to identify and manage wounds is an important NSP service. Many people who inject drugs consider assessment of injection sites by physicians and nurses to be acceptable and an important component of ongoing care. Therefore, skin and vein care should be incorporated into NSPs.

The most important components of NSP services to address IRCs include:

- Service staffed by medical personnel (doctors and nurses) who provide specialized care (including prescription of antibiotics and surgical interventions)
- Timely referrals
- Advertising of the service

To see the full version of the Best Practice Recommendations, go to:

<http://www.catie.ca/sites/default/files/bestpractice-harmreduction-part2.pdf>