What about when you can’t get new needles or other injection equipment?

Living in a place without a needle exchange program can make it hard to get new needles and other injection equipment. Here are things you can do to avoid borrowing needles or other injection equipment if you can’t get new supplies:

- Consider switching to drugs you can swallow (parachute), eat, smoke or snort until you can get new injection equipment.
- Keep your own needle or syringe to re-use and don’t let anyone else use it. Mark it with tape, a marker or nail polish so that you know it is yours. Rinse the needle with cold water after you use it so blood does not dry in the syringe and clog it. (Note: This will not kill Hep C or HIV.)
- Stock up on needles, syringes, cooks, filters, water, swabs and ties when you can get to a harm reduction program.
- If you inhale drugs, stock up on pipes or stems, mouthpieces and screens.
- If you have to borrow used drug injection equipment, clean it with bleach before using it (see How to clean a needle with bleach, below). **The bleach must be undiluted.** This may kill HIV, Hep B and some bacteria but it does not kill Hep C.

How to clean a needle with bleach step-by-step

It is safest to use a new needle for every injection. **Cleaning needles with bleach won’t kill Hep C but it may kill HIV and Hep B** and may decrease the amount of Hep C in a used needle. If this is your only option it is better than nothing!

1. Draw up clean water into the syringe.
2. Shake and tap the syringe to loosen blood drops.
3. Shoot out the water.
4. Repeat steps 1, 2 and 3.
5. Draw up **undiluted bleach** into the syringe. The syringe should be completely filled so bleach touches the entire inside area and bottom of the plunger.
6. Let sit for 30 seconds (at least).
7. Shoot out the bleach.
8. Repeat steps 5, 6 and 7.
9. Draw up clean water into the syringe.
10. Shoot out the water.
11. Repeat steps 9 and 10.

If you have to re-use a cooker or a spoon, it can be soaked in undiluted bleach for 30 seconds (at least) and then rinsed thoroughly with clean water.