

Disposing of dirty/used fits

Use the special containers to put used fits in. Needle and syringe exchange outlets give the container to you and you can return it to them for safe disposal.



Do not use a glass container as it may break easily. If you don't have a special container from a needle exchange, use a strong plastic container with a tight fitting lid that cannot be punctured by a needle.



All fits must be kept in a sealed container in a safe place like a locked draw or cupboard. Everyone is allowed by law to have new and used fits if they are safely stored.



Other risks for catching hep C & HIV

Sharing needles for body piercing, tattooing and blades for skin cutting or body scarring (for traditional reasons eg. ceremonies) can spread hep C and HIV and other germs.

If having body piercing or tattooing done at home, make sure it is done safely. Make sure that the friend or relative uses new needles and washes their hands properly with warm soapy water before and after (or even better – wears new latex gloves). Do not share ink for tattooing as hep C can live in the ink for a long time.

Body piercing and tattoos done in a tattoo or piercing shop should also always use new needles, fresh ink and latex gloves.

If we are having body scarring done for personal or traditional reasons (e.g. ceremonies), the area of skin to be cut must be cleaned properly. Cleaning the skin with alcohol swabs or medical antiseptic from a chemist is best.

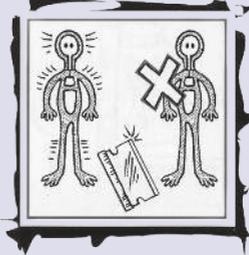
The person doing the skin cutting should wash their hands properly with warm soapy water before and after cutting our skin (or even better – wear new latex gloves). A new blade should be used on each person.



DON'T SHARE NEEDLES for body piercing or tattooing.



DON'T SHARE INK for tattooing.



DON'T SHARE BLADES for skin cutting.



2 Spirits/Queensland AIDS Council

www.quac.org.au

Brisbane & Southern Qld

Phone: 07 3017 1777
Email: 2spirits@quac.org.au
Free call 1800 177 434

Cairns & North Qld

Phone: 07 4041 5451
Email: 2spirits@quac.org.au
Free call 1800 884 401

Hepatitis Queensland

www.hepqld.asn.au

Phone: 07 3846 0020
Info line: 1800 437 222



Artwork - Lawrie Nilsen

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Holding our own

HEP C

An information guide on hepatitis C for Indigenous Gay Men and Sistergirls.

This information is to help protect our future and improve understanding and support for those living with these infections.



About this pamphlet

This pamphlet is written by Murri ones who are gay. It tells us as gay men and sistergirls how to prevent the spread of hepatitis C (hep C). It also helps us to understand and support our people who are living with these illnesses.

This pamphlet is for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gay men and sistergirls no matter which mob you belong to - city or country people, islander or mainlander.

It is important for all of us to be fully aware of the risks of hep C, not only to ourselves, but also to our families, our younger ones (young gay men and sistergirls) and our communities.

This pamphlet is supported by Elders who went to the Minjerriba (Stradbroke Island) HIV/AIDS Elders Forum in 1999. This information does not mean to offend anyone. Non-Indigenous readers should understand respect and not use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander words without consent when talking or writing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Hep C is curable!

New treatment has been available since 1st of March 2016. This is available for all people living with hepatitis C over the age of 18 who have a Medicare Card.

Most of the new medicines are one pill once a day for 2-3 months. If your liver is sick you will need to take the medicines for longer.

Your GP or health Service can prescribe these new medicines now and if your liver is not too sick you won't have to go to a specialist of hospital clinic. Your doctor will be able to help, or will be able to refer you to a doctor who knows about treating hep C.

Talk to your GP, specialist, clinic nurse or call the National Hepatitis Information line on **1800 437 222** (free call) to see if this treatment is right for you.

What is hepatitis C (hep C)?

Hep C is a germ (virus) that can cause damage to our liver over time. If left untreated it can make us very sick.

There are new medicines to treat hep C. They are much easier than the old injections for hep C which used to make people very crook. Now it's one pill once a day, with almost no side effects. Ask your GP/doctor/or Aboriginal medical Service about the new medicines.

It's important to get hep C treated as soon as possible, so you don't pass it on to anyone else, and so it doesn't make your liver sick.

If your liver is already sick, or scarred the medicines are important so that your liver has a chance to heal.

Drinking alcohol/grog can make your liver sick. If you have hep C you can still get the new medicines even if you are drinking or taking drugs, anyone is welcome to get the new medicines.

Who is at risk of getting hep C?

There are lots of ways to get hep C, and some of us will never know how we got it. We might have picked it up early in life if we had a blood transfusion before 1989, or if we had surgery overseas. Hep C is spread by infected blood and it's common for people to get hep C from tattoos and sharing injecting equipment. Those of us who have ever been in prison are also at risk of having hep C.

Anyone who injects drugs and shares needles, syringes (fits) and other injecting equipment is at risk of catching hep C. Small amounts of hep C infected blood can remain in used fits. The amount of blood can be so small you may not actually see it. This infected blood can then be injected into someone else's veins.

Anyone who shares a razor or toothbrush with someone who has hep C is at risk of catching it. Small amounts of hep C infected blood can remain on a razor and toothbrush. The amount of blood can be so small, you may not actually see it.

It is possible to get hep C from having unsafe sex if there is blood present. Therefore it is safer to use a condom. If you have sex without a condom it's a good idea to get a check up, because if you catch hep C you can get it treated.

Coping with stigma and shame

We might feel stigma, shame or judgment if we have hep C. Those feelings might come from something that is said by family, community, our workplace, or a health provider. We don't have to tell anyone if we have hep C. But it's one of those things that is easy to fix now. Everyone has the right to feel good about themselves. Getting medicine for hep C can help us feel better about ourselves. Ring the National Hepatitis Information Line **1800 437 222** to find a friendly doctor. We can step forward and ask for help.

Some of us are living with HIV and hep C. It's important to talk about hep C with doctors who are looking after our HIV, so they can treat the hep C as soon as possible and help keep us well.

Information for people who inject drugs, how to inject safely

Even if we have never injected drugs, or don't inject now, it's good to know about the risks of injecting so we can share what we know with others.

Clean the surface you are going to prepare (mix-up) the drugs on. Use a clean cloth, soapy water or alcohol swabs.

Always use alcohol swabs on your fingers and on the spoon before you mix-up the drugs. This kills the germs that cause illness and infections. Alcohol swabs are only good for one use.

Always clean the spot you are going to inject, with a new alcohol swab. Remember to only wipe in one direction so that you don't drag dirt or germs back across the injecting spot.

Only use sterile water in containers from chemists or needle exchanges. If you haven't got sterile water, you can boil up tap or tank water for a few minutes, but let it cool before using it.

Wash your hands before and immediately after injecting yourself or another person. Hep C spreads very easily between people by small amounts of blood on the fingers.

It is important if we inject drugs that it is done safely. Safe injecting reduces our chances of getting or spreading hep C.

These are some tips to make injecting safer:

- Always use a new fit every time we inject.
- If we don't have a new fit, think about taking the drug another way. Other ways of taking the drug are snorting (up the nose), swallowing, stuffing (up the bum) or smoking it. Remember, if we snort it, don't share the straws because they may have small amounts of blood on them.
- Always wash our hands in warm soapy water before and after we inject ourself or someone else.
- Only use your own spoon, alcohol swab, filter, glass, tourniquets and separate lots of water for mixing and rinsing. Hep C spreads very easily by sharing any of these things with others.
- Clean the surface we are going to prepare (mix-up) the drugs for injecting. Always use a clean cloth and soapy water, or alcohol swabs.
- Always use new alcohol swabs on our fingers and on the spoon before we mix the drugs. This kills the germs that cause illness and infections. Alcohol swabs are only good for one use. Remember to only wipe in one direction so that we don't drag dirt or germs back cross the spot we are going to inject. Swabs are available from needle exchanges and chemists.
- Always use sterile water in containers from chemists or needle exchanges. They don't cost much and they are much safer than tap water. If we haven't got sterile water we can boil up tap or tank water. Make sure that the water boils well for a few minutes and then cools down before we use it.
- Always choose a new spot to inject each time. This keeps the veins healthy and allows them to heal properly between injections.
- Watch where our fingers go. Hep C spreads easily between people by small amounts of blood on the fingers. Wash our hands immediately before and after injecting ourself or another person. Be sure that others who inject us wash their hands before and after injecting.