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# HCV & Harm Reduction

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## COTTON FEVER

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People who inject drugs (PWID) often use pieces of cotton when injecting heroin or a similar drug to filter out impurities (dirt, bacteria) that can be harmful. Cotton fever is caused by bacteria inside of the cotton and not by the cotton itself. There is no 100% way to avoid cotton fever but you can reduce the likelihood of it happening to you. This is NOT a good reason to avoid filtering substances like heroin because the particulates they contain can be more harmful than cotton fever.

Fever, headaches, chills, nausea, muscle and back pain are some common symptoms that will become noticeable within hours after injecting. The symptoms of cotton fever can be like withdrawal and sepsis, a type of bacterial infection.

You can take steps to prevent cotton fever by boiling your cotton before use. This won't guarantee that all the bacteria are killed but it

can help. Unless absolutely unavoidable never reuse your own cotton or someone else's. Frequent use causes the cotton to break down and makes infection more likely.

Most of the time cotton fever won't require medical care. Taking a fever reducer and a bath can help. If your fever doesn't break in a few hours or goes on for a long period of time seek medical care so you can be treated with antibiotics.

### Did You Know:

- Cotton fever is caused by the bacteria that lives in cotton not by the cotton itself.
- You can't completely avoid getting cotton fever but you can greatly reduce your chances by not reusing your own cotton or someone else's as well as boiling cotton before use.

learn more by visiting [www.hcvadvocate.org](http://www.hcvadvocate.org)

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