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HCV & Harm Reduction

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INDIRECT SHARING

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Indirect or “secondary” sharing occurs when people who inject drugs (PWID) use their own syringe/needle but share some, or all, of the other equipment used during the injection drug use process. Examples are cookers, cotton and water. Although HIV dies soon after being exposed to air, hepatitis C lives for up to 6 weeks in dry blood on a dry surface. Hepatitis C is seven times more infectious per injection than HIV, which means the secondary sharing of a cooker, cotton, or water opens people up to a higher risk of contracting hepatitis C.

Some research shows that hepatitis C can be killed by cooking drugs in a cooker at a high enough temperature for roughly 90 seconds. As well as leaving bleach in a syringe for two minutes. Although these methods have been shown to be somewhat effective they must be done properly and for the correct amount of time. An inability to do this will render them ineffective, which is why it's best to never share and always use new equipment.

Many people know to not share syringes but cookers, cotton, water and straws are less well known. This has led many people to share and put themselves at risk unknowingly. Keep these tips in mind to reduce your risk of contracting hepatitis C and HIV when injecting drugs and using substances.

- Do not share any equipment. This includes syringes, cookers, cotton, water, tourniquets, pipes and straws.
- Make sure the surface you are preparing on is clean.
- When possible do not reuse a syringe.
- Clearly mark or separate your equipment from someone else's to lower the likelihood of mixing up equipment.
- Try to locate a syringe access program (or syringe exchange program). These places often have harm reduction equipment and resources that people who use inject drugs and use substances can get for free.

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