

## PREVENTING ABSCESES

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You can prevent abscesses and lower the risk of infection by taking steps to stay healthy:

- Wash your hands and injection site
- Use clean cookers and water every time
- Use new cotton every time you draw a hit
- Use an alcohol pad to clean the injection site
- Use a new sterile syringe every time
- Rotate where you inject
- Get a Tetanus booster shot every 5 years



To avoid an abscess, make your injection as clean and safe as possible, every time.

The best way to avoid abscesses, overdose, Hepatitis C, HIV, or other health conditions is to stop using. You can always ask a staff person for information or assistance on safe practices for drug use, treatment, and safe sex practices.

## LIFEPOINT SYRINGE ACCESS PROGRAM

**Vivent Health**  
1311 N 6<sup>th</sup> St  
Milwaukee, WI 53212  
(414) 225-1608

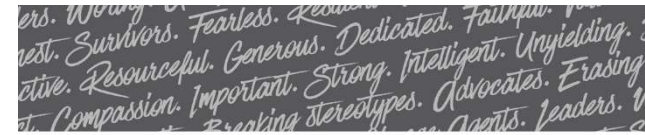
**\*HIV and Hep C Testing Available**

Adapted from resources created by the Harm Reduction Coalition

# ABSCESS CARE AND PREVENTION

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## Harm Reduction Information for Injection Drug Users



## WARNING

- **Do not** shoot into or near an abscess
- **Do not** squeeze or cut into an abscess yourself- infection can spread
- **Do not** leave draining abscess uncovered- infection can spread

## WHAT IS A SKIN ABSCESS?

An abscess is a pocket of pus under the skin. Injection drug users are at risk for abscesses they normally are found close to injection sites and are most common with skin-popping, muscling, or missing a vein while delivering a hit.

### Symptoms

- Pink or red lump on the skin
- Tender or painful
- Warm or hot to the touch
- Red streaks or fast swelling means the infection is spreading

Abscesses can also make you feel tired or sick, give you a fever or chills, and chest pains if the infection goes to the heart or lungs.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE AN ABSCESS?

### At home treatment:

You can treat an abscess at home if the skin is not hot and puffy and there are no red streaks.

There are two at home treatments to do this:

1. Soak abscess in a tub of hot water (that doesn't burn) or hot water and Epsom salt
2. Use a hot, wet, clean wash cloth and hold it on the abscess



Soak **3-4 times each day for 10-15 minutes**, then cover it with a clean, dry bandage. **STOP** soaking and using a compress when the abscess starts draining.



## REMINDERS

### Go to a clinic if:

- The abscess doesn't get better, especially if it has been 5-7 days
- The abscess is getting bigger or is very painful
- The abscess is hot and puffy
- Red streaks are starting to spread from the abscess - GO ASAP!

### Go to emergency room if:

- You have chest pain
- You have a high fever and/or chills
- The red streaks are spreading fast

### What about antibiotics?

- If prescribed, **take all your antibiotics** (even if you are feeling better)
- Take antibiotics **after** your fix (if using heroin, you don't want to vomit the medicine)
- **Do not share antibiotics.** Someone else's pills may not cure your infection
- Do not take antibiotics with alcohol, juice, or soda because they may upset your stomach
- Return to the doctor if your infection is not better after taking all the antibiotics.