

This is a book on how to stay safer and healthier if you use IV drugs.

It would not have been possible without the experts in our advisory group. They have been more than helpful.

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It is our hope that this book will bring helpful information to those who want and need it. Please contact Streetworks if you wish to buy or reproduce this book.

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General Health Info

It is important to be as healthy as possible if you use drugs. This can be hard to do, especially if you don't have food or a place to stay. Even getting enough sleep or eating something with meat, vegetables, fruit, or milk will help your body stay strong. It is especially important if you're on a "run". Your body can only take so much!

You can still respect your body if you use. No matter what any one says, you're very important and deserve good

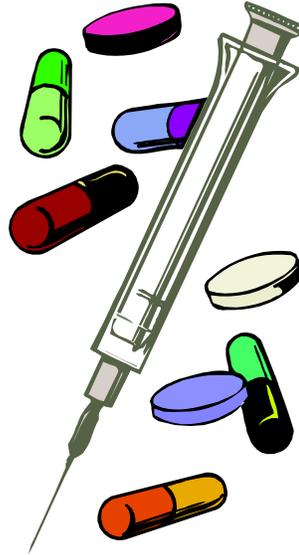


health!

For more information on your health, you might want to check out our other booklets, *Germs: How To Stay Healthy on the Street* and *Street First Aid*.

Tips for Safer Injecting

- 1) Have your own rigs or works
 - You can use a needle exchange (like Streetworks) or buy them from a drug store.
- 2) Don't lend or borrow rigs
 - Used needles can have HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), hepatitis, and many other germs.
- 3) Have your **own** spoon and water (equipment) for mixing
 - Other people's spoons and water will contain any germs they may have.
- 4) **ALWAYS** use an alcohol swab to clean your skin **before** fixing and never lick the spoon or needle.
 - This will help prevent infections.
 - If dirt gets on the rig, wipe it with an alcohol swab.
 - Don't use an alcohol swab **after** fixing – it will cause scars.



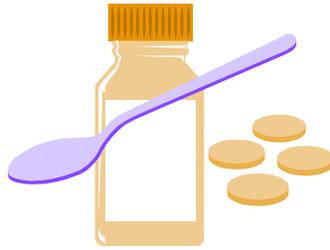
Fixing

1. Buying and Getting Drugs Ready for Injection

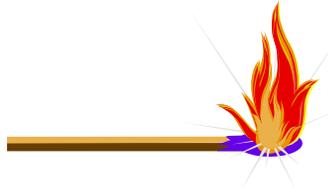
- If you're buying from a new dealer, it's always a good idea to do a "tester or taster". Try a small amount with your own needle to help figure out the perfect dose. If the dealer won't give "samples" at least try to find out how strong it is before fixing.
- Find a good place to fix (like a friend's house). A place that's safe, well-lit, calm and comfortable will cut down on the chance of OD or tweaking. Bathrooms and back alleys can be really unsafe.
- Pills are made to be swallowed, and there is no completely safe way to inject them.
So wherever possible TRY TO AVOID IT!
- If preparing pills, crush as fine as baby powder with your **own** spoons. Use a filter to prevent chalk lung.

Because of the way they're made, pills like Ts and Rs are very hard on the veins and lungs- especially if there're not FILTERED. This may cause an infection and chalk lung. Be sure to filter all drugs. Don't do shakers!

Buying and Getting Drugs Ready for Injection



- It is best to dissolve the powder in water that has been warmed or boiled.
- Some drugs need to be cooked. Heat your own spoon from below with a match or lighter. The warmth will help dissolve the drugs. Allow the liquid to cool to body temperature.



- Be careful about adding anything to your drugs. Citrus juice, dextrose, glucose, baking soda, or vitamin C can hurt your veins and body or change the high you get from the drug.
- Keep your container clean.

2. Filtering

- Get your clean rig ready **BEFORE** you start mixing.
- Even though it's hard to get, try to use one clean dental cotton filter on the end of your needle. This is a good thing to use for filtering because it is clean, small, and won't break apart. If you don't have dental cotton, use a **small, clean piece of a swab, tampon, or cigarette filter**.
- Use a clean filter with each hit.
- You can put the filter in clean or sterile water first to soften it.



- Try not to touch the filter very much. If you do, wash your hands before touching it! That keeps the germs on your hands from getting into your blood.

Try Rothman's, Players Filter, or a stronger cigarette filter. Don't use menthol filters – you may get a feeling or it may affect some drugs.



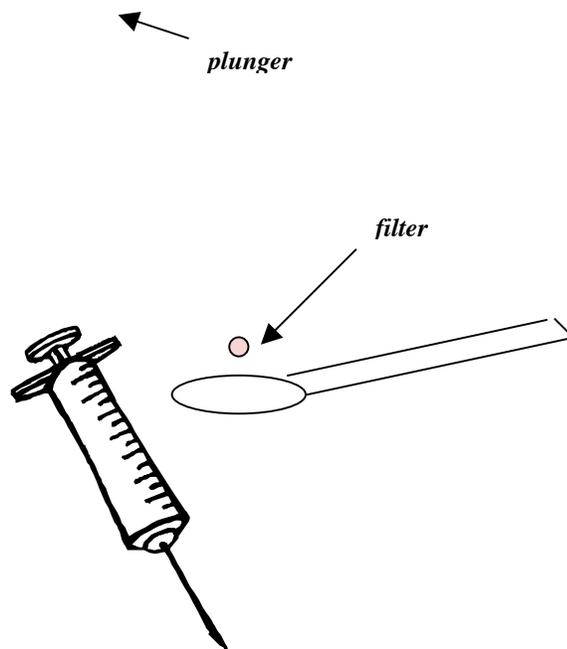
numb

1. Drawing Up

- Don't take the cap off the point until just before you're ready to use it.

Don't mix in blood! Blood starts to clot as soon as it leaves your body. This means you may be fixing clots, which can cause strokes or heart attacks.

- Suck up the mix through the filter. With the filter on the tip of the needle, pull back slowly on the plunger. Pull until you have the right amount. Be careful not to OD!



Draw up sideways so you don't barb the needle.

Drawing Up

- With the needle tip pointing **up**, push the plunger up until all the air is out and a drop shows at the end of the needle. Bubbles of air in your veins can cause problems in your heart.
- You can save the filters in the freezer and eat them later.
- Don't leave filters sitting in drugs – germs will grow!
- Keep your mix in a capped container like a pill bottle to keep dirt out between the drawing of drugs.



- Don't let the needle point touch anything! Hands, clothes, tabletops etc. all have germs on them. You need to keep germs out of your body to stay healthy.

3. Picking a Site

- A vein that feels like a small rubber tube under a sheet is good for injecting.
- It is better to spend time getting a good vein, than to dig around for one with a needle! A miss can lead to pain, a waste of drugs, an infection, or a miss site.

Try:

- Clenching and relaxing your fist.
 - Soaking in warm water or wrapping the arm or leg in a warm cloth.
 - Use a tie or tourniquet or something easy to undo (not a belt) tightened a few inches above vein. Loosen it before you inject the drug once you're in the vein.
- Use different veins each time. The longer the veins rest between fixes, the longer they will last.
 - Work from the bottom up. For example, start with veins in your hands, then forearms, inside elbows, then upper arms. This is so you keep your veins as usable as possible.
 - Try to save one vein for hospital emergencies or blood tests.

Picking a Site

DO NOT fix into your eyes, face, arm pits, penis, or breasts. These veins are so fragile and hard to find that they're not worth the risk! Arms and legs are best. If you take care of your veins, they should last a long time.

PICK UP GRAPHIC FROM FILM p. 8

Hits into your jugular veins (in the neck) are very dangerous. Chunks or clots can go quickly to your brain or heart and cause a stroke or heart attack. Even though some say it's a good rush, it may be your last!

4. How to Fix Safely

- Clean the site with an alcohol swab or soap and water.
- If a friend is helping you fix, make sure their hands are clean.
- Put your arm or leg on something solid so you can fix without moving the limb around.
- Put on the tie a few inches above vein.
- Insert the needle with the hole facing up, into the skin at a 30-45 degree angle.

PICK UP GRAPHIC FROM FILM p. 9

NEVER LICK THE SITE OR NEEDLE, even if you don't have a swab. The germs in your mouth are the same as the ones in your butt! It's better to wash with soap and water or use nothing at all. Also, don't lick the spoon after (unless you wash it with soap and water.)

PICK UP GRAPHIC FROM FILM p. 9

How to Fix Safely

- If you get a flash of blood in the rig, you've hit the vein. If no blood returns, do not inject and pull the needle out. Try again somewhere else.

If blood in the syringe is brighter than usual, frothy looking, or throbbing into syringe, **PULL OUT RIGHT AWAY!** You may have hit an artery. This is a problem and you need to put pressure on it right away. Arteries don't stop bleeding right away so you need to press on it for at least 5 minutes. **Never** inject the drug if you think you've hit an artery (see page 17).

- Remove the tie carefully without pulling the needle out of the vein.
- Inject **SLOWLY**.

PICK UP PHOTO FROM FILM p. 10

How to Fix Safely

- Pull out the needle as soon as you're done.
- Press on the site with a tissue or toilet paper to help your vein heal and stop bleeding.
- When you have finished fixing, put the cap back on your own needle and put it someplace safe. Do not break off the point. The point has germs on it – someone might step or sit on it and get poked.

PICK UP PHOTO FROM FILM p. 11

If you **miss your fix**, apply a clean cold cloth to the vein, which will help stop the burning. Later, apply a warm cloth and massage the area carefully (not too hard). Watch for an abscess and get help if you need it.

Used Rigs

- A used rig is a dangerous thing. You never know what's in it.
- **The best place for used rigs is in a sealed, poke-proof box or container. Coffee or tobacco jars or tin cans with lids are perfect.**
- Keep your rigs in a safe place. Take them to the needle exchange and get new ones.
- If you are exchanging needles for friends, be very careful not to get poked.

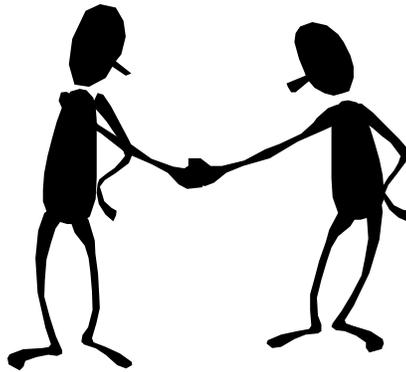
If you do exchanges for other people, try to get them to **bundle their rigs** before giving them to you. You're doing a great thing, and this makes it much safer. It helps prevent you from getting poked by accident.

- Don't throw the needle in the garbage, on the street, a yard, roof, sewer, etc. This is dangerous for other people and makes the community dislike users even more!
- Be a respectful user! Use common sense. Don't make it hard on everyone else.



Used Rigs

- If the cops are searching you, tell them if you have needles in your pockets. This will prevent hassles should the cop get poked.
- Every user knows what it's like to need a fix really badly. Even if you want to help a friend, **DON'T LEND OUT YOUR NEEDLES OR EQUIPMENT**. It may be worse for you and them in the end. Also don't ask to **borrow** a friend's needle. Your friend might look healthy, but still have germs. They may not know, or may not be straight with you. Always try to have 2 spare clean rigs, one for yourself and one for a friend. Only give out *new* rigs to friends.



Many people are getting infected with HIV and other diseases by sharing **equipment**. The virus can live in your water bottle, spoons, cookers, filters, or any thing else used for injecting! So make sure you have your **OWN** supply of everything you need.

Overdose (OD)

An OD is what happens when someone has too much of a drug that their body can't handle. The body system goes "haywire".

This can make them do "**the chicken**" (have a seizure) or go under.

1. Call 911

- If a person won't wake up or can't stay awake OR
- If the person has a seizure for longer than 2 minutes OR
- If the person is coughing or has trouble breathing after the seizure OR
- If the person has more than one seizure in a day.

2. Roll them into the "recovery position".

This makes them safer. It prevents more problems (like choking on puke or their tongue).

PICK UP GRAPHIC FROM FILM p. 15

3. Stay with them if you can until help comes.

DO NOT put the person in the shower. This just makes them wet and cold! It could even give them more problems like a heart attack or shock.

Overdose (OD)

Salt shots: although some people suggest injecting salt to treat ODs, **this is not a good idea.** There is nothing chemical in salt that would help make the person better. It may even make them even worse (like causing heart problems).



There are different ways to save people who OD. It depends on what drug they took. A coke OD is totally different from a heroin OD. **The medical help needs to know what drugs were used.**

If you can, try to find out what drug and when it was taken. If you can't stay to talk to the ambulance, quickly write down the name of the drug and leave it with the person. Remember that cops can't get info from health care workers (unless there is a court order).

Hitting an Artery



Veins and arteries are one-way systems going in different directions.

- Veins take blood from the edges of your body to your heart and lungs.
- Arteries take blood from your heart and lungs to the edges of your body. Arteries are deeper than veins.

That is why you can usually feel arteries pumping- they come right from the heart!

PICK UP GRAPHICS FROM FILM p. 17

It is very dangerous to inject or pop an artery.

- You could lose A LOT of blood.
- You could lose an arm or leg!

Hitting an Artery

You will know you have hit an artery if:

- The plunger is pushed back by the high pressure of blood.
- You pull back on the plunger and the blood is frothy or much brighter red than usual.

If in doubt, PULL OUT.

What to do if you think you've hit an artery:

1. **Don't inject the drug!**
2. Pull out the needle.
3. Raise the limb where the needle poked.
4. Press hard on site for at least 5 minutes or until bleeding stops.
5. **If you have bleeding or swelling or if the arm or leg becomes very painful after 10 minutes, GET HELP- go to a clinic or an emergency department.**

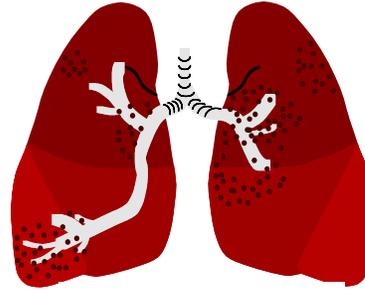


Chalk Lung

Chalk lung can be a BIG problem.

Injecting something that won't mix with water causes chalk lung. These pieces can be talc, chalk, cornstarch, etc. Many pills like Ts and Rs have a lot of these pieces. All drugs usually have some "extra" ingredients!

The veins in your lungs are very tiny. When pieces of chalk end up there, your lungs scar and make it hard to breathe. Many people (including some doctors!) think chalk lung is asthma. It looks the same, but it's not the same. Some people describe it as "trying to breathe with rocks in your lungs."



The Lungs

Unfortunately, there is not much help for people with chalk lung. Once you get chalk lung, you may have to use an oxygen tank for the rest of your life!

The best way to prevent chalk lung is by **FILTERING CAREFULLY ALL THE TIME!!** This is very important for **ALL** injection drug users, but especially for those injecting pills, or anything "stepped on". See pages 5-7. Don't do shakers!

Abscesses and Skin Infections

An **abscess** is also called a boil. It is a pocket of pus under your skin. Abscesses are caused by tiny germs that get pushed under the skin. These germs live all over the outside of everyone's body.



These germs are so tiny that even a thin needle can carry them into the body. Once under the skin, they love to **MULTIPLY** and can cause **BIG PROBLEMS!**

This can lead to skin infections or even worse infections of the blood (called a septic infection) OR heart (called endocarditis).

Another type of skin infection is called **cellulitis**. Cellulitis is caused when a germ gets into the layers of the skin and spreads. When the skin gets very red and hot, and the area gets bigger and bigger, it may be cellulitis. This needs special antibiotics. See a real doctor or needle exchange staff.

Abscesses and Skin Infections

Infections can be hard to heal. It is better to **prevent** infection.

Here are some ways to prevent skin infections when fixing:

1. Find a vein.
2. Take an alcohol swab and rub in circles over the site.
This will help kill the germs on your skin.

PICK UP GRAPHIC FROM FILM p. 21

3. Let it dry.
4. Inject carefully.
5. Remove needle and apply pressure using a Kleenex, cotton, or toilet paper.

PICK UP GRAPHIC FROM FILM p. 21

- **Do not lick the site or needle before or after injecting. Don't mix in blood.**
- **Don't let the point touch anything but your mix or your skin.**

Abscesses and Skin Infections

- **Wiping with an alcohol swab AFTER fixing or to clean wounds doesn't do any good. It can even cause scars. Only use wipes BEFORE you fix, or clean with soap and water.**
- Any infection can become very serious. The body's defense system is usually able to kill off these bugs, but sometimes it can't handle the workload. This is especially true if you've got health problems like HIV, are just worn down, or even sick with a cold. The germs can also spread to other areas of the body, and this is very dangerous. **If you notice a fever that won't go away after 2 days, pain, redness, or swelling at an injection site that is spreading fast YOU NEED TO SEE A DOCTOR RIGHT AWAY.**
- Germs grow best in places that are warm, dark and moist. Keep sores dry and clean, open them to air and light as soon as they are healed enough not to need a bandage.
- If a red line forms along a vein, it could mean blood poisoning. Get medical help right away.

Abscesses and Skin Infections

It is always best to see a doctor or nurse. Many infections need special treatment or antibiotics.



If you choose to **drain** the abscess yourself, there are a few things to remember.

- Apply something warm to the area (or soak it) 4 or 5 times a day. This should help bring the pus to a head.
- Use a clean needle if you poke the sore.
- NEVER squeeze very hard. The fluid should come out without much pressure. Squeezing can push the infection even more under your skin.

Holes in the skin **MUST** heal from bottom up. Don't try to



Always keep the abscess as clean as possible. The best way to clean it is to wash it with soap and water. Keep a dry, clean bandage over the site.

squeeze the top edges together with tape. You may end up with a hole under the skin that will never close right.

Hepatitis C

People can get Hep C when they get other people's blood in their body. This can happen by sharing rigs, water, spoons, filters, straws, pipes, needles or ink for tattooing, razors, or toothbrushes. Even if something looks like there isn't any blood on it, the drops might be so small you might not be able to see them with your own eyes.

What about sex?

Hep C doesn't spread that easily through sex, but it's always safer to use a condom. If a woman is having her period or if a man has any cuts or sores on his penis, Hep C could be passed that way. Same for rough sex.

Signs of hepatitis (sometimes there are NO signs)

- Feeling really tired
- Not really feeling hungry
- Feeling like you're going to throw up
- Yellow skin or yellow eyes instead of white
- Your shit may be white or cream coloured instead of normal brown
- Pain in your gut, especially on right side
- Pain in your joints

There is no vaccine or cure for hepatitis C. There are some drugs used to treat Hep C, but a lot of people can't use them. If you've got Hep C the best thing to do is to take care of yourself by trying to eat and sleep well, quitting or cutting back on your drinking, and trying not to use drugs that are tough on your liver. If you have one thing (like Hep C) and get another (like HIV) it can make you sicker. Talk to a nurse, doctor, or needle exchange staff if you have any questions.

HIV/AIDS

HIV is a virus that attacks a person's immune system. Over time the virus may kill the immune system. When it no longer works, the person will get sick – this is called AIDS. People can die from the infections that they can't fight off. Some people can have HIV for 10 years or more before they get sick.

- HIV is spread through body fluids like blood and cum.
- You can get HIV through sharing rigs and equipment or through sex (straight fucking, up the ass, oral sex, or sharing sex toys).

How can I avoid getting HIV?

- Don't share rigs or equipment (like water, filters, cookers) when fixing.
- Don't share pipes or straws if snorting (you might have cracks on your lips or nose).
- Use condoms (with extra lube) or dams no matter what kind of sex you're having or who you're having it with.
- Don't share needles or ink for tattoos.
- Don't share razors.

There is no cure for HIV but there are some drugs that you can take. Talk to your doctor and get as much information as you can.

Hepatitis B

Hep B is spread the same way as HIV – through blood and cum. There **is** a vaccine for Hep B – talk to a nurse or needle exchange staff for info.

Cotton Fever

Cotton fever happens when you're filtering and a piece of

the filter gets into your blood. It usually happens right after a fix. You get a fever and feel **really** sick. Your bones ache, you're cold and hot at the same time, and you shake. Sometimes you don't get high from your drug at all. If this happens, try not to be alone. Rest and get something to eat. Cover up with a blanket. Take some ASA or acetaminophen. Cotton fever usually gets better within an hour. If it lasts longer it could be something more serious, like an infection. Go to a hospital or doctor right away.

Heart Infection

An infection of the heart is very serious. It can kill you if you don't get it treated.



Signs and symptoms

- A fever, night sweats or chills for a couple of days (without any other reason)
- Coughing
- Feeling short of breath or chest pain
- Feeling tired and weak
- Weight loss

If you get endocarditis, you will need special IV antibiotics and will probably be in the hospital for a while. You can have some problems for a long time afterwards.

The sooner you see a doctor, the better it is for you.

Prevention is the key

- Always use clean equipment. Wash cookers, containers, spoons, etc. in soapy water and dry them well.
- Only use your own equipment.
- Try to use water which is sterilized or has been boiled and cooled. Have your **own** supply of water.
- Boil between fixes so you aren't tempted to not do it, and have time to let the water cool.
- Use a clean needle every time. Keep germs off of it!

Universal Precautions

This is a fancy term that just means you can protect yourself from germs in other people's blood.

By now, we all know that germs live in and on all people. Blood, semen (cum), and vaginal fluid can carry HIV and hepatitis.

To protect yourself, you need to keep other people's blood **out** of your body. Remember, people who have these germs usually don't look sick.

Use these tips with everyone, and they should use them with you:

- Cover any cuts, scratches, or open areas on your skin, even small ones, until they have a hard scab or are healed.
- If someone is bleeding, put something between you and the blood. Rubber gloves are best, but if you don't have any, something like a clean cloth or a plastic bag will help.
- If you get someone else's blood on you, wash it off right away.



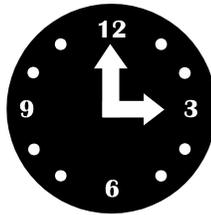
You only need to worry about tears, pee, poop, puke, spit, or sweat if there is blood in them.

Universal Precautions

If you get poked by someone else's needle:

- Squeeze as much blood out as you can **immediately**.
- Wash the poke site right away with soap and water.
- Go to a doctor or emergency department. There are special drugs that can prevent you from getting sick. These drugs work best if you take them within 1-4 hours of getting poked.

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26



- Ask the other person to come with you. They may need to get tested too. The sooner you do, the better.

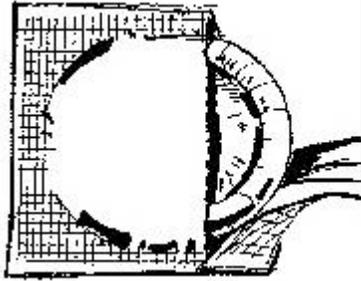
A Word about Sex

HIV and other germs are also spread by sex. You can help prevent spreading germs from sex by safely protecting yourself with a condom.

PICK UP GRAPHIC FROM FILM
p. 27

- Always use a condom.
- Always have a condom with you. If you are getting high and having sex, a condom may be hard to remember. Keep them close by.
- Condoms may break if they are kept in a place which is too hot or cold, like your purse or pocket. Try to keep them about room temperature.
- Rough sex is really risky.
- If you are working the streets, don't take extra money from a date to go without. Your health is worth much more than a few dollars!
- Throw the used condoms in the garbage after you're done. Keep them off the street.

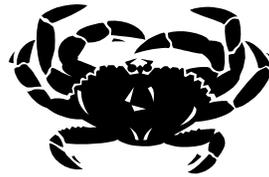
A Word about Sex



- Teeth and fingernails can snag a condom, and it may break. Be gentle with them!

- Check the date on the condom to make sure it isn't too old.
- Don't double bag. The 2 condoms may rub together and break.
- Use extra lube. **Wetter is safer.** Dry sex can cause cracks in your skin and soreness, and then the germs can get into your body.
- Always use a strong condom and lots of lube for butt sex because it is the riskiest kind of sex. It's risky because your butt doesn't stretch easily. There can be rips in the skin and tissue so the germ can get in easier.

**Condoms DO NOT
always protect you
from crabs, herpes, or
genital warts.**



Having a Baby and Using Drugs

If you are pregnant, you need to take very good care of yourself! If it's possible, try not to use drugs during your pregnancy. If you can't quit, try to cut down as much as you can. Every little bit helps! Try to find other ways of doing drugs than injecting. Other things you can do for you and your baby are:

- Be with people who support you.
- Eat as well as possible.
- Get lots of rest.
- Find a doctor or nurse you can trust.
- Go to your appointments.
- Get on the Health for Two milk program.



Trust yourself. If things don't feel right, get help.

Even if you feel well, using drugs can lead to problems with you or your baby. Some of these problems may be:

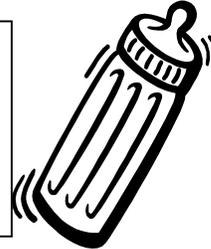
Having a Baby and Using Drugs

- The baby may be too small or come too early.
- The baby may be born addicted to drugs.
- The placenta can come away from mom's womb too early. **This is very dangerous.**
- You may bleed too much during the delivery.

Tips:

- Use a condom while you're pregnant.
- If you are working the streets, try not to do lays for 6 weeks after the baby is born. It is easier to get infections because the birth canal isn't completely closed yet. Do blow jobs or hand jobs instead.
- Try not to inject into the veins in your breast. Even if they're easy to find while you're pregnant or nursing, it's not a good idea. It can cause bad infections, or if you miss, it may go into your milk glands.
- Child Welfare may become involved. Find someone to help you with this.
- Choose your drugs more carefully. Switch to safer drugs.
- Try to avoid cocaine and alcohol.
- Try smoking pot instead of fixing.

It is better to bottle feed a new baby if you are using drugs, because the drugs can pass on through the milk.



Thinking of Quitting?

Some people quit on their own by cutting down or quitting cold turkey. For some, planning ahead helps. Figure out what makes you want to use, or where, or with who, and try to avoid them. This can be hard if it's about where you stay. It's bonus if you can find a friend who will help you.

Getting clean is a big deal and can be quite scary. It can be really hard on your body for a while. Quitting is your best choice and the healthiest thing



to do, but people usually need help to do it. It takes a strong will, support, time, and patience, but lots of people have been able to stay clean.

Some people choose detox and a treatment centre.

There are many people who can help you. Please ask the needle exchange staff, a doctor, therapist, elder, nurse, or someone you know if you're thinking about quitting.