



## Screens for crack stems: Questions and Answers

### What is a screen?

When smoking crack cocaine, a screen is used to hold the rock of crack cocaine in place near the end of the glass stem (also known as a crack pipe). Screens fit snugly within the stem and are typically made from a small piece of metal with holes to allow for inhalation of crack vapour.

### Why should a screen be used?

People who smoke crack often use steel wool (which is frequently referred to by the brand name 'Brillo') for screens. However, this practice has been associated with injury since small pieces of steel wool can come off and can cause burns on the lips and mouth. There is also danger of deeper inhalation or ingestion, which can cause burns in the airways and along the tract to the stomach<sup>1,2</sup>. Using a brass screen provided by the Harm Reduction Strategies and Services rather than steel wool can minimize the likelihood of these injuries.

It is also acceptable to wrap the brass screens completely around the steel wool and use them together as a screen. Some people who use crack cocaine find that this makes using a screen easier for them.

### Why does BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services provide screens?

Using the screens provided by BC Harm Reduction Strategies and Services helps avoid some of the injuries associated with using steel wool as a makeshift screen such as: burns, and both inhalation and ingestion of steel.

Providing brass screens to enable safer drug use not only reduces the chance of injury to the user, but creates a way to engage hard-to-reach and under-serviced populations. No studies have found that providing safe supplies makes people more likely to engage in harmful drug use.

### How can screens be ordered?

Screens can be ordered by harm reduction distribution sites which are approved by the appropriate regional health authority. The harm reduction supply requisition form available on-line at <http://www.bccdc.ca/default.htm> should be used, and screens should be ordered at the same time as other harm reduction supplies. The completed form is faxed to BCCDC.

### References

\*See *Health File #102a: Understanding Harm Reduction* in the BC Health Guide for a definition of harm reduction: <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile102a.stm>

1. Moettus A and Tandberg D. Brillo pad crack screen aspiration and ingestion. *J Emerg Med*, 1998; 16(6): 861-3.
2. Ludwig WG and Hoffner RJ. Upper airway burn from crack cocaine pipe screen ingestion. *Am J Emerg Med*, 2999; 17(1): 108-9.