

Safer Substance Use Practices

Harm Reduction Manual

Updated: April 29, 2026



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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Introduction

This section includes information and links to resources about how to use substances in safer ways using harm reduction practices.

Background

Safer substance use involves taking steps to lower the risk of harms. Using substances can cause serious harms, including death and injury from [drug poisoning \(overdose\)](#), [blood-borne infections](#) such as hepatitis B and C and HIV from sharing used equipment, [infections](#) such as abscesses (an infected pus-filled lump), cellulitis (an infection of skin), osteomyelitis (an infection of the bone), sepsis (a life-threatening reaction to infection), and endocarditis (infection of the heart) from higher risk practices or from substances that contain harmful ingredients.³ A harm reduction approach can reduce the harms of substance use and maintain people's health while they are using substances.^{1,2}

A key part of harm reduction is **supporting people where they are at**, whether they are actively using substances or not using substances at all. This means service providers should spend time listening to people who use substances (PWUS) without judgment to understand their needs. From there, you can offer useful information and tools to help people reduce risks for substance use harms.⁴

Sharing resources, education, and coaching on safer ways of using substances supports the health and well-being of PWUS by:

- Promoting safer substance use practices,
- Reducing the likelihood of using higher risk practices,
- Making it easier to access different kinds of health and social services, and
- Offering non-judgemental information.

Giving out safer substance use supplies along with safer substance use education and coaching has been shown to:⁴⁻¹²

- Reduce stigma,
- Increase access to health and social services,
- Reduce sharing of substance use equipment,
- Encourage safer substance use practices, and
- Support PWUS to share safer substance use practices with peers.

Service providers are encouraged to learn about safer substance use practices for several different ways of using substances, such as snorting, injection, [inhalation](#) (smoking), and rectal use (up the bum,

also called [booty bumping](#) or boofing). The rest of this section includes links to resources about safer substance use practices for each of these ways of using substances.

Harm Reduction Education and Resources

Learn more about a harm reduction approach to support people who use substances by clicking on the following resources:

See [Section 4](#) - Harm Reduction for more information on a harm reduction approach to services.

[CATIE Harm Reduction Fundamentals](#) is a self-directed course for service providers to understand, prevent, and address substance use related harms to support the health of people who use substances.

[Vancouver Coastal Health Harm Reduction 101 Course](#) is available to anyone with a Learning Hub account. This self-paced course provides information on the basics of harm reduction, the impacts of stigma and substance use, harm reduction tools and supplies, and service delivery.

Here are resources where you can learn more about using substances more safely:

- [Section 5](#) - Harm Reduction Supplies & Distribution Guidance for information on safer substance use and safer sex supplies provided by the BCCDC provincial distribution program and how to use these supplies.
- [CATIE Best Practice Recommendations for Canadian Harm Reduction Programs](#) for information to help service providers develop, implement, and evaluate programs for people who use substances.
- [CATIE Sharp Shooters](#) for information on safer injection substance use practices.
- [CATIE Fact Sheets](#) Safer Substance Use category for detailed information on safer substance practices.

Safer Inhalation

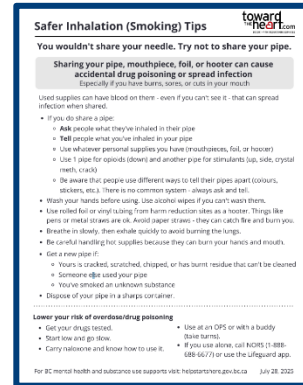
This section includes links to resources about how to use substances more safely when inhaling (smoking). Click on the title or picture and the resource will open in your web browser.

Basics of Safer Smoking



This Vancouver Coastal Health brochure created by peers outlines tips for safer inhalation.

Safer Inhalation (Smoking) Tips



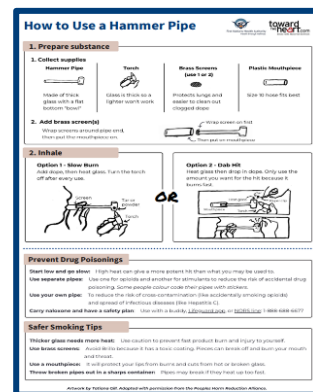
This poster and handout outlines tips for safer inhalation.

Making a Foil Hooter



This resource provides a visual description of how to make a foil hooter.

How to Use a Hammer Pipe



This resource provides an overview of how to use a hammer pipe.

Taking Care of Safer Smoking Supplies

About our Supplies
The supplies in this resource (tubing, screens, push sticks, pipes and foil) are distributed through Harm Reduction Services at the BCCDC. All items distributed through our program meet Canadian regulations to ensure the health and safety of people using them.

Pipe Care

- Maintaining stems/crack pipes: using a push stick, push alcohol swabs back and forth inside the pipe to remove residue.
- Maintaining bowl/mesh pipes: soak in alcohol or vinegar solution to remove residue, rather than using a push stick, as they are more fragile.

How Pipes Break
Pipes distributed through the Harm Reduction Program and Health Authorities are made of safety glass which are stronger than other glass products but they can still break. Handling with care will help prolong the life of your pipe.

- Overheating in one area or drastic temperature changes
- Dropping or stepping on it
- Sitting on it while it is in your pocket
- Rough handling
- Using a metal object while cleaning

How to Prevent a Broken Pipe

- Keep it in a hard case, like an eyeliner case!
- Use wooden push stick to scrape, clean, and push screens back and forth, rather than a metal instrument
- Warm the pipe slightly before scraping/residue off the inside
- Move the heat source around when smoking to avoid cracking

Safer Smoking Supplies
toward the heart.com
HEALTH HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

Oploid Overdose
Call 911
Give Breaths
Give Naloxone

Stimulant Overdose
Call 911
Stay and Help
Keep them comfortable, conscious, and hydrated

Mix of Drugs? Naloxone can still help, it's safe

NOTE: Our current drug supply is unpredictable and toxic. Overdoses can happen even if you smoke a naloxone kit, it could save a life!

This brochure for people who use substances describes safer smoking supplies and how to take care of them.

Safer Smoking: Crack Cocaine

Safer smoking information: Crack cocaine

FACT SHEET
Updated 2021
www.catie.ca
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This fact sheet provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to smoke crack cocaine more safely. Crack cocaine is a stimulant. This means that it speeds the body up, which can increase heart rate, energy and alertness.

Smoking drugs can lead to a range of health issues, including cuts, burns, blisters and sores on the mouth, lips and gums, bloodborne infections such as hepatitis B and C and other infections like pneumonia. Smoking drugs also carries a risk of overdose or drug toxicity.

By using safer smoking supplies, not sharing supplies and following other safer smoking practices, people who smoke drugs can significantly reduce their risk of health issues. Providing access to harm reduction supplies and education helps support people to use drugs as safely as possible. It also opens the door to build relationships and provide referrals to other health and social services, including treatment services.

Safer smoking supplies
Choosing to smoke using safer smoking supplies prevents transmission of infections like hepatitis B and C, and can reduce harm to the lungs and to the lips and mouth. All supplies are for personal use and should not be shared with others. These supplies are not perfect and can still pose a risk when shared, even if it's only for one use.

This fact sheet by CATIE provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to smoke crack cocaine more safely.

Safer Smoking: Crystal Meth

Safer smoking information: Crystal meth

FACT SHEET
Updated 2021
www.catie.ca
© CATIE

This fact sheet provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to smoke crystal meth more safely. Crystal meth is a stimulant. This means that it speeds the body up, which can increase heart rate, energy and alertness.

Smoking drugs can lead to a range of health issues, including cuts, burns, blisters and sores on the mouth, lips and gums, bloodborne infections such as hepatitis B and C and other infections like pneumonia. Smoking drugs also carries a risk of overdose or drug toxicity.

By using safer smoking supplies, not sharing supplies and following other safer smoking practices, people who smoke drugs can significantly reduce their risk of health issues. Providing access to harm reduction supplies and education helps support people to use drugs as safely as possible. It also opens the door to build relationships and provide referrals to other health and social services, including treatment services.

Safer smoking supplies
Using safer smoking supplies and not sharing supplies prevents transmission of infections like hepatitis B and C, and can reduce harm to the lungs and to the lips and mouth. All supplies are for personal use and should not be shared with others. These supplies are not perfect and can still pose a risk when shared, even if it's only for one use.

This fact sheet by CATIE provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to smoke crystal meth more safely.

Safer Smoking: Smoking with Foil

Safer smoking information: Smoking with foil

FACT SHEET
Updated 2021
www.catie.ca
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This fact sheet provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to more safely smoke drugs using foil. Foil is used as a filter to smoke drugs sometimes known as "chasing the dragon". Many different drugs are smoked with foil, including heroin, benzoin, crack cocaine, crystal meth and some mixed pills. People use different supplies such as screens, straight stems or foil tubes to make the inhaled.

For people who smoke drugs, smoking drugs with foil is an effective way to lower the risk of many health issues related to smoking drugs including lung damage, bloodborne infections such as hepatitis B and C, and other types of blood, air and heart infections. However, smoking drugs with foil can lead to some harm, including overdose or drug toxicity.

By using safer smoking supplies, not sharing supplies and following other safer smoking practices, people who smoke drugs can significantly reduce their risk of health issues. Providing access to harm reduction supplies and education helps support people to use drugs as safely as possible. It also opens the door to build relationships and provide referrals to other health and social services, including treatment services.

Safer smoking supplies
Using safer smoking supplies and not sharing supplies prevents transmission of infections like hepatitis B and C, and can reduce harm to the lungs and to the lips and mouth. All supplies are for personal use and should not be shared with others. These supplies are not perfect and can still pose a risk when shared, even if it's only for one use.

This fact sheet by CATIE provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to more safely smoke drugs using foil.

Safer Injection

This section includes links to resources on how to use substances more safely when injecting. Click on the title or picture and the resource will open in your web browser.

Basics of Safer Injecting



This Vancouver Coastal Health brochure created by peers outlines tips for safer injecting.

How to Filter Drugs Safely with Cotton

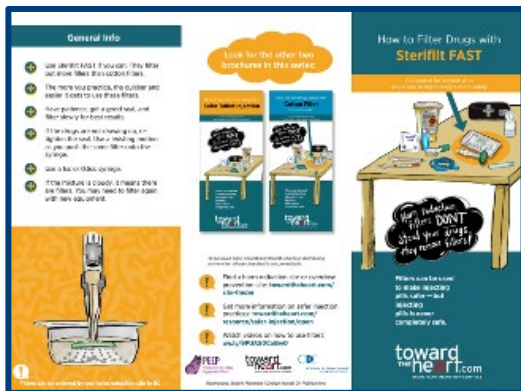
Filter



This pamphlet provides an overview of how to filter drugs safely using a cotton filter.

How to Filter Drugs Safely with Sterifilt®

FAST



This pamphlet provides an overview of how to filter drugs safely using a Sterifilt® FAST filter.

Skin Infections and Safer Substance Use

Tips



This resource provides information about skin infections that can result from injection, and ways to avoid them.

How to Safely Get Rid of Used Sharps



This infographic shows how to use a sharps container, or a different safe container if you do not have access to a sharps container.

Safer Injecting Information: Crystal Meth



This fact sheet by CATIE provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to inject crystal meth more safely.

Safer Injecting Information: Fentanyl & Heroin



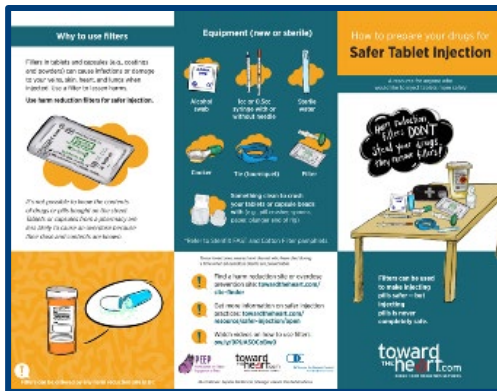
This fact sheet by CATIE provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to inject fentanyl and heroin more safely.

Safer Injecting Information: Powder & Crack Cocaine



This fact sheet by CATIE provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to inject powder and crack cocaine more safely.

How to Prepare Your Drugs for Safer Tablet Injection



This pamphlet provides an overview of safer tablet injection, including equipment, preparing and dissolving a dose, and filtering.

Safer Injecting Information: Opioid Tablets & Capsules



This fact sheet by CATIE provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to inject opioid tablets and capsules more safely.

Safer Snorting

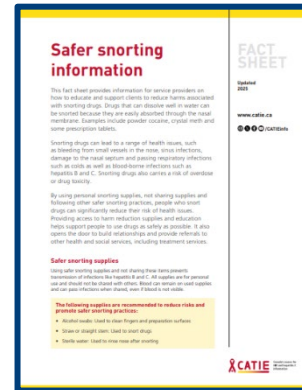
This section includes links to resources on how to use substances more safely when snorting (using by insufflation). Click on the title or picture and the resource will open in your web browser.

[Safer Snorting Booklet](#)



This booklet by CATIE has information about safer snorting.

[Safer Snorting Information Fact Sheet](#)

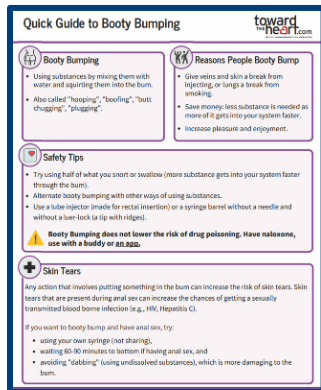


This fact sheet by CATIE provides information for service providers on how to educate and support clients to reduce harms associated with snorting substances.

Safer Rectal Use

This section includes links to a resource on how to use substances more safely when using rectally, or up the bum. This is also called booty bumping or boofing. Click on the title or picture and the resource will open in your web browser.

[Quick Guide to Booty Bumping](#)



This resource provides a quick guide to booty bumping, including reasons why people booty bump, safety tips, how to reduce tissue tears, and a step-by-step guide for how to do it safely.

Glossary

Blood-borne infection refers to an illness that spreads through contact with blood that carries certain viruses or bacteria. This can happen through activities like sharing injection equipment or having sex without barrier protection (condoms). For example, HIV, and hepatitis B and C are blood-borne infections.

Booty bumping means using substances rectally (in the bum). Also called boofing.

Drug poisoning refers to harms to the body that can occur from consumption of a toxic amount of substances. Drug poisoning is an umbrella term that does not indicate the type of substance. A drug poisoning caused by opioids is called an opioid poisoning. Sometimes referred to as 'overdose'.

Inhalation (smoking) refers to inhalation of substances, usually by using a pipe (stem, bubble, hammer, etc.) or foil and hooter (tube used to inhale the vapour).

Insufflation (nasal) means consuming substances by snorting into the nose.

Soft tissue infection refers to bacterial infections that affect the skin and surrounding tissues. For example, cellulitis (infection of the skin) and abscesses (a closed lump of pus cause by an infection).

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