

# HIV & HARM REDUCTION FROM INJECTING DRUGS

Sharing needles and syringes to inject drugs risks infections such as HIV and Hepatitis.

Find out about the services and treatments available to reduce these risks.

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We rely on donations to provide HIV and AIDS information worldwide [www.avert.org/donate](http://www.avert.org/donate)

Last review: March 2016

Next review: March 2019

References: [www.avert.org/learn-share/hiv-fact-sheets/harm-reduction](http://www.avert.org/learn-share/hiv-fact-sheets/harm-reduction)



AVERTing HIV and AIDS

Charity no: 1074849



## What is harm reduction?

Methods that reduce the harm and risk of infections from injecting drugs.

Harm reduction methods to prevent HIV infection include:

- needle & syringe programmes (NSP)
- opioid substitution therapy (OST).

## Unsafe injecting



Blood stays in needles and syringes after use.



This blood may contain HIV if someone who is HIV-positive used the equipment.



The more blood in the syringe, the longer it takes HIV to die.



Do not share this equipment, always use your own!

You can get new needles, syringes and other equipment from places such as:



NSP sites or vans, pharmacies or peers.

## Needle & syringe programmes (NSP)

Get new, sterile needles and syringes, usually for free.

Dispose of used needles & syringes here.

Some NSPs have an age restriction, i.e. won't give equipment to people under 18 or 21.

Basic NSP services:



clean needles & syringes



needle & syringe disposal



health information & advice



counselling



referrals to other services.

Extra NSP services:

- other injecting equipment
- medical care
- HIV/STI/pregnancy testing
- free condoms
- opioid substitution therapy (OST).

# Opioid substitution therapy (OST)

OST could benefit anyone who uses opioids such as heroin.

Opioid medicines are an alternative to the opiate drugs you take.

Your craving for opiate drugs will lessen over time, allowing you to overcome withdrawal symptoms and manage your addiction.

Harm or risk of HIV infection is reduced, as you use oral OST instead.

You will be monitored for a period of time while you take OST.

## The substitution medicines:

### 1. Methadone

- The most common option.
- A syrup or pill.
- Single daily dose.
- Start on a low dose - increased gradually.

The preferred option if you:

- experience anxiety as a withdrawal symptom
- have used drugs for a long time
- used more than one drug (including alcohol).

### 2. Buprenorphine

- 2nd most common option.
- Taken once a day or every other day.
- Taken under the tongue.
- More expensive than methadone.
- Less sedating than methadone.
- Milder withdrawal symptoms than methadone.
- Not recommended if you have liver dysfunction.
- Not recommended during pregnancy.

## Benefits of OST

- Reduces the need to inject and therefore the risk of harm or HIV infection.
- Reduces withdrawal symptoms.
- Improves mental and physical health.
- No need to buy street drugs.
- Can take methadone throughout pregnancy and after childbirth.
- Find links to other healthcare services such as HIV care.

## Remember

- No set length of treatment time, it varies from person to person.
- Currently no substitution for non-opioid drugs.
- Some countries consider OST illegal, check with your healthcare professional.
- Some countries believe in total drug abstinence, before OST may be started.

## Drug consumption rooms

This is a location where you can inject safely, with medical staff on hand.




This reduces the chance of harm or HIV transmission when injecting.

It also prevents the risk of overdose.

However, they are not available everywhere.

## Know your rights

You have the right to:

-  not share used equipment
-  new sterile needles and syringes
-  refuse a drug detox.