

What to look out for:

You should be aware that soft tissue infections **can** be serious and not underestimate the **potential** severity of such infections.

In some cases the time between developing what seem like minor physical symptoms and developing a severe illness and then possibly death can be very short.

Small skin problems may be the only visible signs of a developing serious illness.

Common signs of wound infection:

- The site of infection is painful and hot
- The redness spreads from the original area of infection
- There is sometimes pus and smell

These infections require treatment and antibiotics

Also

- Leg wounds that remain unhealed for 4 weeks, and
 - Leg ulcers that appear not at the injecting site but elsewhere on the leg
- should be examined

Healthy wounds:

- Should look Clean
- Be bright red in colour
- The skin around the wound should look normal
- Should form dry scabs

If you have concerns regarding possibly contaminated drugs:

- Smoke rather than inject, or,
- If injecting can not be avoided, inject into veins rather than muscles or under the skin.

Seek **urgent** medical help at A&E if you develop a seriously painful abscess or injecting site—delays can be fatal

Bacterial Infections And Injecting Drug Use

Information for those who inject Heroin and Crack

How can I get Bacterial Infections?

Bacterial infections can be caused through use of **contaminated drugs** or through the use of **contaminated of water or works**.

They can be passed from an infected drug user by sharing works, or from your own bacteria living on the outside of the body.

You are more likely to get bacterial infections if you inject into the muscle or under the skin—this is the perfect place for bacteria to grow.

If you inject bacteria into your veins, the white blood cells in your blood will start to work against these bacteria and will often prevent infection taking hold. However, poor hygiene increases the exposure to infections and poor nutrition can handicap the body's resistance.

Using more acid than needed to dissolve heroin may cause vein and tissue damage which can act as a focus for bacterial growth.

What are Bacterial Infections?

An infection occurs when a harmful micro organism (germ) invades the body and causes damage. These germs can be viruses, which must live inside a host cell, bacteria, and more complex parasites such as malaria.

The human body is equipped to defend itself against these invaders **but** injecting foreign substances through the skin can bypass many of these defences.

As a result injecting drug users have high rates of infection, both from viruses such as HIV and hepatitis, and from bacteria.

Bacterial infections usually present as **abscesses** or **cellulitis**, however they can be serious overwhelming infections like **septicaemia** (blood poisoning), **gangrene**, **Necrotising Faciitis** ("flesh eating bugs!") or toxic shock syndrome.

Other infections connected with drug use include **pneumonia** (inflammation of the lungs), **meningitis** (inflammation of the brain and spine), **botulism** (paralysis which spreads to the arms, legs, trunk and respiratory system) and **septic arthritis**, an infection of the joints.

Unlike viruses, which must live inside cells, bacteria exist throughout the environment and some, like **Tetanus**,^{***} form spores, which can survive for very long periods.

^{***} There is a vaccination for **tetanus** that most people have when young and then have booster vaccinations every 10 years. If you are not fully vaccinated—speak to your GP.

The skin, nose, throat, and gut are home to millions of bacteria, most of which do no harm and some are actually helpful. **But**, if these bacteria are transferred past the body's defences however, the story is different and serious infections may result.

At any one time 1/3 of injecting drug users have a soft tissue abscess or cellulitis.

What can you do to reduce the risks of bacterial infections?

- **Wash hands before injecting**
- **Clean injecting sites before injecting**—e.g. using sterile alcohol based swabs and allow it to dry.
- **Use sterile, clean injecting equipment**
- **Do not lick the needle** prior to injecting—they're no longer sterile but covered in the bacteria from your mouth
- **Avoid sharing filters, spoons, flushing water, Vit C/Citric—**
- **Avoid reusing any injecting paraphernalia** including spoons, cookers, filters, left over Vit C/Citric
- **Do not use excessive amounts of Vit C/ Citric.**
- **Never use lemon juice** which may contain candida which can cause blindness
- **Avoid skin popping and intramuscular injecting**
- **Take care to prevent heroin contamination** by, for example, soil or sewage type waste
- **Do not store drugs in toilets/cisterns or in body cavities.**

Specialist information on injecting

- The **Needle Exchange** in the portacabin at **162 Whitegate Drive** will provide information, advice and basic health checks including advice on injecting site infections and wound management.
This is especially important for groin injectors with a sinus—a permanently open wound into which they inject.

This is not an alternative to Accident and Emergency if you are having serious problems or are in serious pain or distress.

Get into treatment—Blackpool now has it's shortest waiting time for prescribed treatment in years.

- **Blackpool has an open access service, where you can just walk in and see someone.** There are a few forms to be filled in, but it will not take long and the person will be an experienced drug worker. From the information you give, they will be able to give you information on different treatment options and refer you to the appropriate service. **The service is at Drugline-Lancs Ltd, 102 Dickson Road, Blackpool FY12BU or phone us on 01253 311431.**