

## How can I reduce my risk for abscesses?

- **Before you inject**, *WASH your skin and hands with HOT, SOAPY WATER.* Hot water and scrubbing make the veins bigger.
- **Use a BRAND NEW, STERILE NEEDLE** every time you inject or divide drugs. If you can't get a new needle, use one that is well rinsed, bleach it for at least 30 seconds, then rinse it again with fresh clean water.
- **Use clean cottons**, clean cookers, and fresh clean water every time.
- **Clean the injection site properly** with alcohol wipes.
- **Don't lick the needle** before you inject. You carry a lot of bacteria in your mouth that can cause infections under your skin.
- **Choose good veins.** Drink lots of water to make your veins bigger and easier to find. Bigger veins are less likely to cause problems like infection or abscesses if you miss.
- **Use a tourniquet** to make skinnier veins bigger and easier to see and hit.
- **Slow down. Relax.** Take a deep breath to help keep your hand steady so you don't miss. Shaky hands from previous use or withdrawal can make it harder to get it right.
- **Avoid injecting** into your hands and especially avoid your feet and legs.

## Where do I shoot? Vein? Muscle? Skin? What's safer?

They can all lead to infections like HIV and Hepatitis B and C. Muscling and skin popping are more likely to cause abscesses and skin infections. If treated early, these usually go away quickly. Injecting into a vein can lead to longer-term problems, like endocarditis, and is more likely to cause an overdose. Abscesses can be painful and leave scars, but they're rarely deadly. However, endocarditis and overdose are more likely to result in death.

### Warnings!!!

- **DO NOT** inject into or near an abscess.
- **DO NOT** squeeze or cut into an abscess — you could push germs into your blood, which might lead to bacteria getting to your heart. This can cause an infection in the heart called endocarditis, which can be life-threatening.
- *People with weak immune systems are more likely to develop abscesses. If you have a weak immune system, you need to be even more careful.*

## I've got no money. Where do I go for help?

Get free or low-cost treatment at the Robert Clewis Center Medical Clinic or a community health clinic. For an emergency, go to a medical center. See the resource list in this brochure for Seattle area numbers.

The Robert Clewis Medical Clinic is open during the following hours:

- **Monday, 1:00pm - 4:00pm**
- **Wednesday & Friday, 9:00am - 4:30pm**

First come first serve! Walk-ins are always welcome!

### Use alcohol wipes before every injection!

- Alcohol wipes help to remove dirt and germs from your skin.
- This makes an "antiseptic field" on your arm.
- Alcohol wipes lowers your chances for "tracks" (scar tissue), abscesses (pus pockets), and other infections.
- They stimulate the skin surface and make it shine.
- Hard-to-find veins are easier to see and inject, especially if you use side lighting!

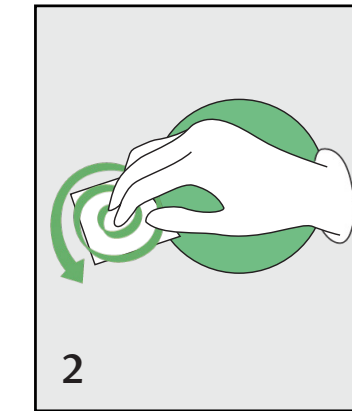
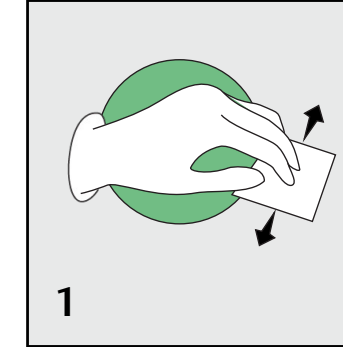
Wash your hands and skin!  
Use plenty of hot, soapy water!  
Follow up with alcohol pads!



## How do I use alcohol pads?

### Step one:

Take an alcohol pad and wipe **back** and **forth** where you plan to inject. This will probably be your arm. Press kind of hard this first time. Use as many pads as you need to get the dirt off of your skin. **But don't stop here!**



### Step two:

Now grab a **new pad** and press down over the spot where you're going to inject. This time, wipe in a circle. **Start with small circles and make bigger circles as you go around.** This pushes any leftover dirt and bacteria on your skin **outward** from the spot where you're going to shoot.

**Note:** If you bleed after you shoot, press down with dry cotton or a band-aid to stop the flow. Don't use an alcohol pad; alcohol slows down clotting.

# all about Abscesses

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# Abscesses

## What is an abscess?

An abscess is a pocket of pus. Pus means you have an infection. Pus is made of dead tissue, germs (bacteria), and white blood cells. The white blood cells fight the germs. Sometimes, abscesses will burst and drain. This is one way the body helps get rid of the infection.

## What causes an abscess?

An abscess can form anywhere in the body where bacteria infect tissue. People who inject drugs often get abscesses on their arms or legs, usually at injection sites, though not always. You are more likely to hurt your tissue and get an abscess if you "skin pop," "muscle it," or miss your vein. Both the cut and the drug itself can cause infection and damage the tissue. You can even get an abscess after you stop injecting.

## Where do the germs come from?

Germs are invisible without a microscope. They are on most surfaces, including skin, and on any used item such as a needle, cooker, cotton, or tourniquet. Germs are on your skin — even if you think you're clean. All of these germs can get into your body.

## What signs should I look for?

A hard, reddish, tender lump usually shows up at the injection site, but it can appear in other areas too. The lump may feel warmer than the surrounding skin and could even feel hot. It usually hurts and might look pink and swollen. If it gets bigger, the infection is getting worse. As the infection spreads, you might notice red streaks moving out from the abscess. The infection could make you feel tired or cause fever and chills. If the infection spreads to your heart or lungs, you might have chest pain.

## What should I do if I get an abscess?

It depends on how bad it is. Here are some guidelines.

Treat at **HOME** with a HOT SOAK if:

- You don't have any red streaks or hot puffy skin around it.

Go to a **CLINIC** if:

- It has not improved after 5 to 7 days.
- The lump gets bigger or more painful.
- You see red streaks spreading out from the lump.
- The lump is hot, puffy, and pink, or if you get a fever.

Go to the **EMERGENCY ROOM** if:

- The infection looks like it is spreading really fast.
- You have chest pains.
- You have chills or a high fever.

## About Hot Soaking...

Soaking helps draw out the infection. It helps the abscess come to a head and drain.

## How do I hot soak?

- Soak the abscess in a tub of *plain hot water*. This works well if the abscess is on your hand or lower arm.
- Better yet, soak it in *hot water* and *Epsom Salts*.
- Make sure the water is hot, but not so hot that it burns your skin.
- Hold a hot, wet wash cloth over the abscess if the abscess is in a spot you can't easily put under water.
- Soak at least 3 or 4 times a day, 10 to 15 minutes each time.

**If you have a bad infection**, you may need to take antibiotics. If your doctor prescribes antibiotics, be sure to finish them **ALL** — even if you feel better before they're used up. If you don't take the whole course of antibiotics, or if you don't take them correctly, the germs they are supposed to treat can develop resistance. Resistant bacteria make antibiotics less useful against future infections. If pus is trapped under the skin, a health provider may need to open the wound to drain the pus. Antibiotics alone may not treat trapped pus.

## Abscess & Wound Care

Country Doctor Community Clinic  
(serves Capitol Hill) ..... (206) 461-4503  
45th Street Clinic (serves mostly  
U-District & Wallingford) ..... (206) 633-3350  
Robert Clewis Center (4th & Blanchard) .. (206) 521-1855  
Pike Market Medical Clinic  
(serves mostly downtown) ..... (206) 728-4143  
Pioneer Square Clinic ..... (206) 744-1500  
Hobson Place Clinic ..... (206) 744-2001  
Third Avenue Center ..... (206) 521-1231

## Emergency Care

Harborview Medical Center  
Emergency .....(206) 731-3074  
Providence Seattle Medical Center  
Emergency ..... (206) 320-2111  
Evergreen Hospital Medical Center  
Emergency ..... (425) 899-1700  
Overlake Hospital Medical Center  
Emergency ..... (425) 688-5200  
Valley Medical Center Emergency ..... (425) 251-5185  
University of Washington Medical Center (206) 598-4000

## Drug Treatment & Support

Alcohol/Drug 24 Hour Helpline ..... (206) 722-3700  
Crisis Clinic ..... (206) 461-3222  
Community Information Line ..... (206) 461-3200

## Needles/Sharps Disposal

Needle Exchange ..... (206) 205-7837  
Seattle Public Utilities ..... (206) 684-7600

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