

Diseases and Viruses Spread Through Sharing Needles or Syringes (Injectables)

The Risk of Sharing Needles or Syringes (Injectables)

There are several diseases and viruses that can be spread through sharing needles or syringes (injectables) used to inject illegal drugs.

Do not use illegal drugs. If you do and cannot stop, do not share needles or syringes.

HIV and AIDS

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the cells in your body that help it fight infection and disease. The virus is mainly found in blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breastmilk.

HIV weakens your immune system so you can become sick with illnesses that a healthy immune system could fight.

If you are infected with HIV, you may develop AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). This disease occurs when HIV destroys your body's immune system. When your immune system fails, you can become very sick and die.

You can be infected and feel healthy. The only way to know if you have HIV is to take a test. You can go to a health care provider for a confidential test or buy a home collection kit (available at pharmacies).

If you have HIV, there are treatments that can help you live longer. Find a health care provider who knows how to treat HIV and follow any instructions they give you.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). The virus is found in the stool (poop) of people who are infected with hepatitis A.

Most adults who have hepatitis A have symptoms that develop over several days. Symptoms include:

- yellow eyes (jaundice)
- dark urine
- tiredness
- appetite loss
- upset stomach, throwing up or stomach ache
- fever.

No treatment is needed unless nausea and vomiting cause dehydration.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Hepatitis B can cause liver cancer, liver disease and death.

About 30 percent (3 in 10) of people do not have symptoms of hepatitis B. Symptoms are more common in adults. Symptoms include:

- yellow eyes (jaundice)
- abdominal or joint pain
- fatigue
- appetite loss
- upset stomach, throwing up or stomach ache
- fever.

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There are medicines that can treat long-lasting hepatitis B infection, but there is no cure.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hepatitis C can cause liver disease that can lead to the need for a liver transplant.

Most people do not have symptoms of hepatitis C. Symptoms include:

- yellow eyes (jaundice)
- dark urine
- abdominal pain
- fatigue
- appetite loss
- upset stomach.

Many people who have long-term hepatitis C have no symptoms and feel well.

Interferon and ribavirin are medicines prescribed to treat hepatitis C. They can be given together or interferon can be used alone. Do not drink alcohol, which can make liver disease worse.

Prevention

Anyone can get these viruses or diseases by sharing needles or syringes with an infected person.

- **Do not use illegal drugs. If you do and cannot stop, do not share needles or syringes.**
- Consider the risks of getting tattoos and body piercings. Be sure the artist or piercer uses safe techniques.

For More Information

- Go to [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and type “injectables” in the search box at the top.
- Talk with your health care provider if you have questions about your health.
- Visit [allinahealth.org/mentalhealth](https://www.allinahealth.org/mentalhealth) for mental health and addiction care.