

Health advice services for drug users

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Drug use is associated with many social and health problems. The ill-effects on your health may be connected to certain effects from drugs, the way drugs are used or diseases that develop with long-term use. Social problems connect with an asocial subculture, crimes associated with drug use, as well as, social exclusion associated with long-term drug use.

The most serious health hazards related to drug use include overdoses, especially opiate overdoses and various long-term or life-long viral infections, such as HIV or hepatitis infections. Hepatitis B spreads both through intravenous and intra-muscular injection as well as through sex. Hepatitis C is mainly spread through injections. HIV spreads both through injections and sexual contact. Hepatitis B can be effectively prevented by a three-part vaccination. There are no vaccinations against hepatitis C or HIV.

Once drug use becomes a steady habit for the drug user, it may take years before s/he even considers stopping. Putting an end to drug use may also take years of attempts to stop with intermittent relapses. Even when the user is not ready to give up drug use, these years can positively impact the serious risks of drug behaviour. Changing the way in which the drug is used or changing behaviours associated with drug use can provide safer alternatives for living. During the past few years health advice centres for intravenous drug user have been opened in many municipalities in Finland. The centres offer general information, counselling services and help the drug users to take care of their own well-being. They exchange used injection equipment for clean, disposable ones, offer HIV and hepatitis tests, treat small cuts, refer drug users to other treatment facilities etc.

Correct, relevant and neutral information about infections, overdoses and other risks and avoidance techniques may help the drug user to change the ways s/he prepares and uses drugs so risks are reduced even though the drug use continues. The availability of clean injection equipment is also very important in the prevention of blood-borne infections. If the drug user begins to see to it that s/he always uses clean injection equipment, it may spark a more comprehensive interest in his/her own health and may gradually even lead him/her to give up drugs.

Health advice centres provide advice, tools and support for drug users, so that they could better look after themselves and be responsible for their own health as well as for the health of other drug users. Health advice centres can also gradually motivate drug users to use other services, e.g. visit health centres or hospitals for HIV or hepatitis related examinations or seek out detoxification or rehabilitation treatments or medicinal treatment for opiate addicts.

Services:

Hepatitis and HIV tests and counselling:

- health centres
- polyclinics for venereal diseases
- units for infectious diseases
- treatment units in the field of intoxicant treatment
- health care units in prisons and health advice centres for drug users

Vaccination against hepatitis B, free of charge, to drug users who use drugs intravenously, intramuscularly and subcutaneously, and also to their families:

- health centres
- units for infectious diseases
- treatment units in the field of intoxicant treatment
- health care units in prisons
- health advice centres for drug users

General information and counselling services:

- health centres
- treatment units in the field of intoxicant treatment

- health advice centres for drug users

Replacement of used injection equipment:

[Health advice centres for drug users](#)

Clean injection equipment can be bought at many pharmacies.

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[Brochures in Finnish ►](#)

Hepatiitti B ja siltä suojautuminen ('Hepatitis B and how to protect yourself from it'), 6€/20 copies. [The A-Clinic Foundation](#), tel. 09 - 6220 290.

Tietoa ruiskuhuumeita käyttävälle ('Information for users of intravenous drugs'). Free of charge. The National Public Health Institute, tel. 09 - 4744 8488.

[For more information ►](#)

[Contact information of health advice centres for drug users](#)

[Hepatitis B and how to protect yourself from it](#)

[Hepatitis C and how to protect yourself from it](#)

[HIV and how to protect yourself from it](#)

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