

What is an abscess??

An abscess is a pocket of pus caused by bacteria infected tissue. People who inject often get abscesses on their arms and legs - mostly (but not always) at injection sites. You are more likely to damage tissue and develop an abscess if you "skin-pop", "muscle it", or miss your vein. Both the cut and the drug itself can cause infection and damage tissue. You can even get an abscess AFTER you stop injecting.



What does an abscess look like?

Look for a hard, reddish, tender lump. It will usually appear at the injection site, but it can also pop up in other places. The lump might feel warmer than the skin around it. It might even feel hot and usually hurts. It might look pink and puffy but if it gets bigger, the infection is getting worse. As the infection spreads, you might see red streaks spreading out and away from the abscess. The infection might make you feel tired or cause fever or chills. You might have chest pains if the infection goes to your heart or lungs.

What should I do if I get an abscess?

Treatment depends on how bad the abscess is. Here are some guidelines:

Treat at HOME with a WARM SOAK (See inside for information) 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.
- The lump is hot, puffy, and pink, or if you get a fever.
- You see red streaks spreading out from the lump (you need to be seen for this ASAP).

Go to the EMERGENCY ROOM if:

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

Pierce County Clinics Near You

Community Health Care

253-597-4550

Multiple Pierce County Clinics. Call for information. Multiple languages available.

PLU Wellness Clinic

253-535-7354

Corner of 121st and Pacific Avenue
Parkland, WA

Weekdays and evening hours.

Call for information.

SeaMar Clinic

253-593-2144

1112 S Cushman; Tacoma
Monday-Friday 8:00am-5:00pm

Call for information.

Spanish language available.

For more information on where to get care call:

**Tacoma-Pierce County
Health Department
253-798-6410**

www.tpchd.org

For Pierce County
Syringe Exchange Sites call:
Point Defiance AIDS Prevention Project
253-272-4857 Or
TPCHD Outreach Services
253-798-6410

Reference: <http://www.metrokc.gov/health/>

ABSCCESS CARE AND PREVENTION

Information for
Injection Drug Users



- Abscess Information and Treatment
- Needle Safety
- Cleaning the Injection Site
- Local Clinic Locations

How Do I Reduce My Risk?



Whether you inject into muscle, a vein, or under the skin, it is always important to use sterile equipment. **NEVER SHARE YOUR WORKS WITH ANYONE ELSE.** (See the back of this brochure for **needle exchange sites and contact information**). Muscling and skin-popping **DO NOT** lower your risk of infection.

Steps to reduce your risk of getting an infection:

- 1) **Always** use a **brand new sterile syringe** every time you inject.
- 2) **Wash your hands** and the **injection site** well.
- 3) **Use an alcohol pad** to clean the injection site. (See "Cleaning injection site, Step 1 and Step 2")
- 4) Use a **clean cooker** and **fresh, clean water** to cook your hit.
- 5) **Filter** the hit well. Use a **brand, new cotton** every time you draw up a hit.
- 6) **Rotate injection sites.**
- 7) Get a **tetanus booster** every 5 years.
- 8) Don't muscle or skin-pop **speed** or **cocaine**.
- 9) **Never lick** your point before injecting. Your **mouth** is full of **germs**.

Cleaning the Injection Site

Step 1: Take an alcohol pad and wipe back and forth where you plan to inject. You want to press kind of hard. Use as many pads as you need to get the dirt off your skin. Don't stop yet!! You're not done.



Step 2: Now grab a new pad and press down over the spot where you are going to inject. This time wipe in a circle. Start with small circles and make bigger circles as you go. This swirling of the wipe pushes any leftover dirt and bacteria out and away from the spot where you are going to inject.



What about antibiotics?

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 are all used up. Also, **never share** your antibiotics with anyone else.

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 your infection is not getting better after taking antibiotics, **check back with your doctor.**

If pus is trapped under the skin, a health care provider may need to open the wound to drain the pus. Antibiotics alone may not treat trapped pus.



WARNINGS!!!

- **DO NOT** shoot into or near an abscess.
- **DO NOT** squeeze or cut into an abscess -- you could push germs into your bloodstream and fatally damage your heart.
- **Abscesses are contagious!!** Any pus coming out of them can easily spread disease to your friends and family. Cover them up!



About Soaking

Soaking may help draw out the infection. It helps the abscess come to a head and drain. **Do not soak or use a compress once the wound is open or draining.**

- Make sure the water is hot **but doesn't burn your skin.**
- Soak the abscess in a tub of plain **hot water**. This works well if the abscess is on your hand or lower arm.
- Even better is to soak it in **hot water** and **Epsom salts**.
- If the abscess is in a spot you can't easily put under water, hold a **hot, wet washcloth** over the abscess.
- If possible, soak the abscess **3 or 4 times a day, 10 to 15 minutes** each time.
- **Cover the wound up with clean, dry dressing** if it opens up after soaking. Don't continue to soak or use a compress.