

ColoradoMAT

Harm Reduction Education



Harm Reduction Information for People who Inject Drugs

Local Resources

Harm Reduction Action Center

231 E Colfax Ave, Denver, CO
80203
(303) 572-7800

Rocky Mountain Crisis Partners

(844) 493-TALK (8225)
Or Text TALK to 38255

OpiRescue

*Free smartphone application

What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. The approach is predicated on respecting patients and their choices, removing stigma and meeting them “where they are” and not where providers believe they should be. In a perfect world, patients would be compelled to quit by logical physician counseling. In reality, however, patients must possess the internal resolve to pursue sobriety before they can enter into recovery; even the most well-meaning advice can be counterproductive if the patient is not ready to receive the message. The simplistic directive to “stop using because you may die” is ineffective and often harmful to the physician-patient relationship.

Harm reduction aims to prevent the spread of infections, including HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B and C, sepsis and endocarditis; reduce the risk of overdose and other drug-related fatalities; and decrease the negative effects that drug use may have on individuals and communities.

Of the thousands of patients who present with opioid-related health concerns, ranging from withdrawal to constipation to overdose to injection-related infections, the fact is that most are not ready to quit on their first visit to the hospital. Given the scope and destruction of the opioid epidemic, clinicians can do better in counseling and treating the addicted patient who is not ready to stop using.

The following are counseling and education tips that clinicians can discuss with patients.

How to Prevent Overdose

- Avoid using alone
 - Drug users should inject in the presence of others for safety. Colorado's good Samaritan laws protect individuals who call 911 to report an overdose, exempting them and the patient from arrest and prosecution for small drug charges.
- Always carry naloxone
 - The evidence in support of naloxone is staggering. Since 1996 the opioid reversal agent has saved more than 26,000 lives.
 - Because most overdoses are witnessed and transpire over hours, naloxone is a patient's most powerful tool for preventing overdose death.
 - Naloxone is safe and effective both in and out of the hospital.
 - Numerous studies over the past 20 years have confirmed that lay people can administer naloxone out of hospital with therapeutic success.
 - The antidote should be dispensed in the hospital to anyone suspected of abusing IV drugs, and at-risk patients should be encouraged to keep the naloxone within reach at all times.
- Try test shots
 - Variations in drug potency are common, especially with the popular practice of cutting or substituting heroin for fentanyl or carfentanil.
 - When trying a new product, patients should use a small test dose (i.e., test shot) to gauge its potency.

How to Prevent HIV, Hepatitis C and Bloodborne Pathogens

- Avoid sharing equipment
 - Although HIV can survive only minutes outside the body, it can live for days to weeks inside hollow-bore needles.
 - The risk of transmission is highest when drug paraphernalia is shared between multiple users within a short period of time.
 - Hepatitis B and C are particularly harmful, and can survive between one and three weeks outside of the body.
 - These pathogens can be spread easily via injection equipment (e.g., needles, syringes, cookers [spoons], injection water and cottons).

How to Prevent Invasive Bacterial Infections and Abscesses

- Practice good hygiene
 - Always encourage hand washing and cleansing of the injection site.
 - If no running water is available, antiseptic towelettes can be a good substitute.
 - Recommend the use of alcohol pads to sterilize skin prior to injection.
- Do not lick needles or use water from a bottle you've drank from to dilute product
- Use sterile equipment
 - Communicable disease can be avoided by not sharing needles.
 - Reusing equipment increases the risk of bacterial contamination.
 - Patients can obtain new equipment for free through local syringe access programs (formerly referred to as needle exchange programs).
 - If such resources are unavailable, advise patients to purchase needles, syringes and alcohol pads at pharmacies.
 - If new paraphernalia cannot be obtained, patients should clean their existing equipment with bleach for at least two minutes, flushing all components and rinsing with clean cold water.
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- Use sterile water to prepare the product
 - Not using sterile water causes many infections. Do not use river water, toilet water or saliva to dissolve.
 - Bottled water is NOT sterile!
 - Optimally, patients will have access to single-use containers of sterile water.
 - If these are unavailable, water should be sterilized by heating it at rolling boil for 10 minutes.

How to Project Veins

- Patients should be advised to use smallest (highest gauge) needle possible; rotate injection sites, starting distally; drink water to remain well hydrated; use citric acid if an acidic solution is required to dissolve product (never lime, lemon or orange juice, which are more sclerotic and carry a higher risk of infection).
- Advise against using veins in the neck, thighs or feet, which can further increase the danger of infection.

Colorado List of Syringe Access Programs

Harm Reduction Action Center

231 E. Colfax Avenue Denver, CO 80203 | 9a - 12p M-F | (303) 572-7800

The Works

3450 Broadway Boulder, CO 80304 | Mon - Fri (2-5pm) | (303) 413-7533

Boulder County Public Health

1735 South Public Road, Lafayette, CO 80026 | Tuesdays & Thursdays from 10:30 – 4:30 p.m. | (720) 564-2706

Boulder County Public Health

515 Coffman, Suite 200, Longmont CO 80501 | Monday – Friday 10:30am-4:30pm | (303) 678-6166

Southern Colorado AIDS Project

807 N. Greenwood St. Suite 200, Pueblo, CO 81003 | (719) 621-1105

Denver Colorado AIDS Project

6260 E Colfax Ave, Denver, CO 80220 | Mon - Thurs 1 - 6pm, Friday 12p - 3p | (303) 837-0166

North Colorado AIDS Project

400 Remington, Suite 100 Ft Collins, CO 80524 | (970) 484-4469

West Colorado Aids Project

805 Main Street Grand Junction, CO 81501 | (970) 243-2437

Points West Syringe Service Program

645 Parfet Street Lakewood, CO 80215 US | 9a - 4pm M - F | (303) 239-7078

Aurora Syringe Access Services

1475 Lima Street Aurora, CO 80010 (Mondays - Thursday 1–400 pm. | 303-363-3077

Southern Colorado Harm Reduction Association

1249 East Routt Ave Pueblo, Colorado | (719) 289-7149 | Saturday 12:30p - 4:30p

Rocky Mountain Cares LifePoint

Mobile SAP for Denver Area | (720) 385-6898

A complete list of local syringe access/harm reduction programs can be found through the [North American Syringe Exchange Network](http://www.nasen.org) (nasen.org).

Sample discharge instructions for patients from ERNaloxone.org

1. [Preventing accidental overdose, a guide to naloxone](#)
2. [Preventing accidental overdose, a guide to your take-home naloxone kit](#)
3. [Preventing accidental overdose, a guide to naloxone for patients with chronic pain](#)
4. [Preventing overdose in people who inject drugs](#)