



## Note to Harm Reduction Programs and Staff Regarding Recent HIV Research and ‘Cook Your Wash’

**The Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program (OHRDP)** and the **Ontario Harm Reduction Network (OHRN)** rely on evidence, the expertise of people who use drugs, researchers, and ‘best practices’ endorsed across Canada and internationally, to determine the products for distribution and the accompanying educational harm reduction messaging.

We appreciate the merits of recent research conducted by *Lawson Health Research Institute* and *Western University* which demonstrated the importance of ‘Cook Your Wash’. It is exciting to learn of new Ontario-based research which has the potential to positively impact the health and wellbeing of people who inject drugs. However, we are concerned that communication and media reporting about these findings contains mixed messages, and that the research findings may be misinterpreted.

Messaging should continue to reinforce the importance of not sharing or re-using any equipment. While this study focused on potential HIV transmission through the re-use of cookers and filters used to prepare *hydromorphone controlled release capsules*, other viruses and bacteria can also be transmitted through intentional, or inadvertent, sharing or re-using of any equipment for preparing any drugs. Ontario Harm Reduction Programs do not recommend people re-use any equipment but recognize that this might not be feasible, all the time, for everyone.

This study helped determine the appropriate length of time to ‘Cook Your Wash’ and demonstrated that heating the solution until it bubbles (about 10 seconds), can help reduce the amount of HIV that may be present in a wash of a *hydromorphone controlled release capsule*. However, messaging to clients should emphasize ‘Cook Your Drug’, not only ‘Cook Your Wash’. Cooking (heating) the solution EVERY TIME may also help reduce the presence of bacteria/mould/yeast/fungi and other pathogens.

Cooking also helps dissolve drugs, which is easier on people’s veins. Cookers are designed specifically for even heat distribution and have heat-resistant handles because their primary function is to heat drugs. This said, cookers are not specifically designed for multiple uses.

Other research findings from Québec also indicate the importance for a ‘cool-off period’ after the solution has been heated. The cool-off period allows any wax-agent used to coat certain pills to accumulate on top of the solution, which can then be removed before injection. The cool-off period also ensures you are not injecting a hot solution, which can damage veins.

OHRN and OHRDP are currently collaborating on a two-phased project focused on the assessment and development of educational resources to support frontline harm reduction staff. We look forward to how this project will inform the future resources harm reduction workers need to best support the individuals they work with. Please see current key messages on the next page...

## Key messages for people who inject drugs

Based on the latest findings and existing Best Practice Recommendations, the following messages are recommended for people who inject drugs:

- It is best to use all new/sterile equipment every time you prepare and use drugs; sharing equipment, or your wash, increases the chances of infections
- Cook Your Drug (including a wash) before every injection
  - Heat the solution until it bubbles, then let it cool-down before injecting – this reduces viral and bacterial infections, makes the wax easier to remove, and will be easier on your veins
- A combination of factors contribute to potential transmission of viral and bacterial infections; you can also reduce risks by:
  - Washing your hands prior to preparing your drugs
  - Cleaning your skin where you will inject, just before you inject
  - Preparing and using drugs in more hygienic environments (use Overdose Prevention and Drug Consumption Sites, if you have access)
- Talk to your harm reduction workers about what safer drug use supplies you can access and ways to use drugs more safely

For any questions about harm reduction supplies, please contact OHRDP: [orders@ohrdp.ca](mailto:orders@ohrdp.ca)

For any questions about harm reduction information and practices, please contact OHRN: [info@ohrn.org](mailto:info@ohrn.org)

## References including media

*Best Practice Recommendations for Canadian Harm Reduction Programs that Provide Service to People Who Use Drugs and are at Risk for HIV, HCV, and Other Harms: Part 1. Toronto, ON: Working Group on Best Practice for Harm Reduction Programs in Canada. (2013)*

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*Chapados et al. Matériel d'injection : réduire les risques chez les injecteurs de médicaments opioïdes, Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec. (2015) [French only]*

[www.inspq.qc.ca/pdf/publications/2045\\_materiel\\_injection\\_reduire\\_risques.pdf](http://www.inspq.qc.ca/pdf/publications/2045_materiel_injection_reduire_risques.pdf)

*Leclerc et al. Évaluation de l'acceptabilité de nouveau matériel pour l'injection de médicaments opioïdes, Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux du Centre-Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (CIUSSS, 2015) [French only; for English version contact OHRDP]*

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*Researchers discover another way HIV can spread among drug users (CTV News, April 25, 2019)*

[www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/health/researchers-discover-another-way-hiv-can-spread-among-drug-users-1.4395087](http://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/health/researchers-discover-another-way-hiv-can-spread-among-drug-users-1.4395087)

*Researchers verify a new method of HIV transmission among injection drug users and an effective prevention technique (CBC News, April 26, 2019)*

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