

DRUGS AND CORONAVIRUS

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is serious and it's spreading fast.

Read this info to keep yourself and your mates safe.

If you have trouble reading, ask your needle exchange worker, your doctor, a mate or even a stranger to read it out for you.

IF YOU USE DRUGS, YOU ARE AT HIGHER RISK FROM COVID-19

- COVID-19 will make the breathing problems you can get from using GHB, opioids, benzos, and alcohol worse.
- If you smoke drugs (like ice or cannabis), tobacco or vape, your breathing is at higher risk from COVID-19 infection which will make smoking (and breathing) even more difficult.
- If you are worried about a health problem that might lead to infection, ask for advice from a needle exchange (NSP) worker or doctor: if you can't speak to someone who can help, the best thing you can do is look after yourself at home or in a safe place.

STOCK UP AND PREPARE: NSPS MAY CLOSE OR REDUCE THEIR HOURS

- A lot of services could be closing soon: exchanges, treatment centres, and self-help groups like NA or AA.
- This will happen quickly if a worker or client gets sick. Will you be ready?
- Prepare by stockpiling enough harm reduction supplies to last you a few weeks – even longer if you are at higher risk of infection or complications.
- This includes naloxone, syringes, cookers, pipes, and straws.
- Get a sharps container to get rid of used syringes. If you can't get one, use something like a plastic laundry detergent bottle or soft drink bottle. Label these bottles "SHARPS CONTAINER". Do not recycle them.

BE PREPARED FOR INVOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL

- Your dealer might get sick or the drug supply might be disrupted. Try to be prepared by stocking up.
- Talk to a doctor or pharmacist about starting on methadone or buprenorphine.
- Make sure you have all the necessary medications, food, and drinks needed to help you through withdrawal or detox.
- Try to have protein-based and electrolyte drinks like Powerade or Gatorade.
- Going through withdrawal can be scary – make sure you stay in touch with your mates.

NALOXONE

- Stock up on naloxone in the event of an unintentional overdose. Because there are lots of people getting sick, emergency services might take longer to reach you if you drop.
- Naloxone is now available as a nasal spray as well as the injection over the counter at pharmacies. It is free in some places. Ask your needle exchange for more information.

GET ON TO OPIOID SUBSTITUTION THERAPY NOW

- Check with your health service, prescriber (GP or nurse) or pharmacist to see if they are planning on closing or changing hours.
- Ask your prescriber if you can have take-homes and longer scripts of methadone or bupe.

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- You may be able to get repeats of some medications, or even have consultations by phone or computer (Skype or Facetime).
- Remember, your health professional will want to find ways to help you stay at home as much as possible.
- Please be aware that having a stockpile of these drugs will increase your risk of overdose. Be careful and be sensible (have naloxone if you use opioids like heroin or painkillers like oxycodone).

MINIMISE YOUR RISK OF GETTING CORONAVIRUS AND PRACTICE HARM REDUCTION

- Don't share ANY injecting equipment, pipes, bongs, joints, straws or banknotes for snorting or spotting.
- Prepare your drugs yourself, don't handle or touch other people's drugs or equipment, and don't let them touch yours.
- Wipe down drug packages and wraps with swabs and/or concentrated alcohol-based cleaners (60% alcohol or more is good).
- Avoid putting drug bags or wraps in your mouth, vagina or anus. If you must carry in your body, clean vigorously with an alcohol-based cleanser before and after you take it out.
- Wash your hands regularly. Make it a habit before and after using drugs, handling money or injecting equipment, being in contact with other people or being in public spaces. Wash with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds. Google "handwashing videos" for more details.
- If you can't get soap and water, use hand sanitiser or swabs from the exchange.
- If you continue to use opioids like heroin or oxycodone, make sure you have naloxone. Try not to use alone. If you must, use somewhere quiet but not totally isolated. Think about whether someone will be able to find you if you drop.
- If you can, get on to opioid substitution therapy like methadone or bupe. Ask your exchange worker for help.

Remember: things are moving fast and may change by the time you read this.

Keep following radio or TV if you can and be careful of rumours about this virus: some of them are wrong!

What we know is that it is dangerous and easy to catch – but it is preventable with simple things like washing hands and avoiding contact with people.

Keep yourself well by drinking water and eating regularly.

We are all in this together and everyone is focussed on getting through with the minimum amount of harm to our community.

For more information including general advice on staying safe, Google "dhhs corona" and click on the first link.

Or go to: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

If you have any questions, talk to your NSP worker.