

- you want to avoid infection or large, unsightly scars
- the swelling does not improve within 1 or 2 days
- the lump gets bigger
- the lump is – despite cooling – hot, reddish and swollen

Go to a hospital / emergency room if:

- the abscess is located near a joint, in the throat, or in the groin area
- you have chest pain
- you feel other strong pains
- you have a fever or chills
- your general condition quickly gets worse

For treatment, you may need to take antibiotics. If your doctor prescribes antibiotics, be sure to finish them entirely, even if you feel better before they are used up. If you don't take the whole course of antibiotics or if you don't take them correctly, the germs that are supposed to treat you can develop resistance. Resistant bacteria can make antibiotics less useful against future infections.

Source

This brochure contains information originally produced by the HIV/AIDS Program, Public Health Seattle & King County, U.S.A., <http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/communicable-diseases/hiv-std/patients/drug-use-harm-reduction.aspx>

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ENGLISH

Fixpunkt Safer Use Infos



FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT:

- verein@fixpunkt.org
- www.fixpunkt.org

Last update: November 2017

Fixpunkt

Ohlauer Str. 22
10999 Berlin



Abscesses

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Abscesses

One of the most common after-effects of injecting drugs are abscesses. Many users think the best course of action is to open up the abscess by puncturing it with a knife or razor blade and then treat it themselves. That is not correct or safe! Abscesses must be treated by a doctor to avoid complications and unsightly scarring.

WHAT IS AN ABSCESS?

An abscess is a pocket of pus on the body, which is indicative of an infection. Pus consists of dead tissue, bacteria and white blood cells.

WHAT CAUSES AN ABSCESS?

An abscess can start anywhere on the body where bacteria have infected damaged tissue. Intravenous drug users often get abscesses on their arms and legs, typically at the injection site but not always. If you inject subcutaneously (directly underneath the skin), into a muscle, or you miss a vein, you are more likely to damage the tissue and develop an abscess.

The puncture or cut, as well as the drug itself, can damage the tissue and cause infection.

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WHERE DO BACTERIA COME FROM?

Bacteria are invisible, and they live on all surfaces and materials involved in injecting, such as needles, cookers, filters, and tourniquets. Bacteria are also on your skin, even if you think it's clean. All of those bacteria can get into your body!

WHAT SIGNS SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

When you have an abscess, a hard, reddish, painful lump or a swollen area develops. It will usually appear at the injection site, but it can also pop up in other places. The swollen area may feel warmer than the surrounding skin, even hot, and it can hurt. The area may appear red and puffy. This infection can spread throughout your whole body, causing you to feel tired, or develop a fever or chills. If you have chest pain, it may indicate that the infection has travelled towards the heart and lungs. If these signs occur, you should immediately see a doctor!

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ANTHRAX

An abscess can be caused by Anthrax bacteria. Anthrax-caused abscesses are very deep, extremely painful, and the infection is life-threatening. The chance of survival is highest when antibiotic treatment starts very early. Though Anthrax is not common, in 2012 there were some cases in Berlin, Germany and other European cities.

▶ *More information about Anthrax see INPUD, www.inpud.net/INPUD_Anthrax_information_for_heroin_users_Issue.3_March.2013.pdf*

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET AN ABSCESS?

Never try to open it yourself! Cool it with ice (wrapped in a waterproof bag), ointment, or something similar when the swelling has just appeared and feels warm. The affected area should be treated with care and not be moved around. You should never inject in or close to an abscess.

Go to a doctor or to Fixpunkt nurses if:

- you are unsure if it really is an abscess
- you need medical advice, cooling ointments or dressing

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