

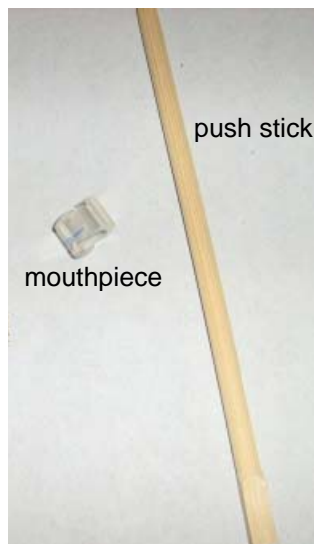
FACT SHEET

HARM REDUCTION – MOUTHPIECES AND PUSH STICKS

The smoking of crack cocaine has risen in recent years among street drug user populations. This drug use practice carries a risk of injuries, such as mouth burns, and communicable diseases, such as Hepatitis C. In order to reduce the risk of these harms, health agencies in BC began providing crack cocaine users with mouthpieces and push sticks in 2008. VIHA Medical Health Officers have been meeting recently with local government officials to discuss this harm reduction strategy.

What is crack cocaine?

Crack cocaine, also known as “crack” or “rock”, is a solid form of cocaine and can be smoked or less commonly injected. It is a powerful stimulant and considered highly addictive. Although this drug crosses over many socio-economic boundaries, it is used by an estimated 70 per cent of street drug users.



What are mouthpieces and push sticks

A “mouthpiece” is actually just a small piece of plastic tubing and the same type of tubing that can be bought in any hardware store. A “push stick” is a thin stick and very similar in appearance to a chopstick.

What is the purpose of distributing mouthpieces and push sticks?

Providing drug users with clean mouthpieces and push sticks, commonly referred to as “crack kits”, helps reduce the spread of communicable diseases. Crack users commonly place their cocaine in a narrow glass tube (similar in size to a pen) and heat one end with a flame while placing the other end in their mouth. This practice causes burns and other injuries on their lips. A majority of crack cocaine users share crack pipes and can put them at risk for communicable diseases such as Hepatitis C or HIV.

Users can place the plastic “mouthpieces” over the glass tube to prevent burns and to prevent exposure to another person’s blood. The “push sticks” help prevent finger burns while placing cocaine in one end of the glass tube.

Harm reduction strategies not only save lives, but can also be a significant savings to the health care system. A single case of Hepatitis C can cost the health care system as much as \$250,000 dollars.

Where do the supplies come from and who pays for them?

The BC Centre for Disease Control’s (BCCDC) Harm Reduction Supplies Program distributes harm reduction supplies across BC at no cost to health authorities. Current supplies for distribution from the

provincial inventory include: needles and syringes, alcohol swabs, water vials, lubrication, condoms, push sticks & mouthpieces.

Will the distribution of mouthpieces and push sticks encourage drug use?

No. In fact, research shows that harm reduction activities such as distributing mouthpieces, push sticks or clean needles do not encourage substance use or abuse.

Where are these items being distributed?

The mouthpieces and push sticks will be distributed through agencies that already provide harm reduction supplies in the Victoria area, including AIDS Vancouver Island, Victoria AIDS Resource & Community Service Society (VARCS), the Society of Living Injection Drug Users (SOLID) as well as the VIHA Street Nursing and Communicable Disease Control programs.

For more information on harm reduction strategies, please visit:

http://www.viha.ca/mho/harm_reduction.htm

<http://www.hls.gov.bc.ca/cdap/harmreduction.html>

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