

ABSCESS PREVENTION

Avoiding abscesses

- Wash your hands and the injection site.
- Use alcohol pads and wipe back & forth (rub hard) over injection site to remove dirt.
- Then use another new alcohol pad for the final cleaning.

What is a skin abscess?

- Pocket of pus
- Often found at injection sites, but can be found elsewhere
- More likely with
 - skin-popping
 - muscling
 - missing a vein
- May occur even after you stop injecting

How do you know it's an abscess?

- Pink or reddish lump on skin
- Tender or painful
- Warm or hot to touch
- Red streaks and/or rapid swelling indicates infection is spreading

How can an abscess make you feel?

- Tired or sick
 - Feverish, may have chills
- (continued above)

- Chest pains may occur if infection goes to heart or lungs

What should I do if I get an abscess?

- **Treat at home with warm soaks only if:**
 - No red streaks
 - Skin not hot and puffy
- **Go to a clinic if abscess:**
 - Not improving, especially after 5-7 days
 - Gets bigger and/or very painful
 - Is hot and puffyRed streaks start spreading from the abscess-go ASAP!
- **Go to emergency room if:**
 - Chest pain
 - High fever, chills
 - Infection looks like it is spreading fast

Warning

- **Do not** shoot into or near an abscess
- **Do not** squeeze or cut into an abscess yourself - infection could move into blood, then heart/lungs
- **Do not** leave draining abscesses uncovered - the drainage is contagious

How do you soak/use compresses?

- Use warm/hot water (that doesn't burn your skin)
- Soak in tub of plain hot water or hot water with Epsom salts
- Use hot, wet, clean washcloth and hold on abscess, if abscess cannot be soaked in tub
- Soak abscess 3 to 4 times a day for 10-15 minutes each time, if possible
- Cover with a clean dry bandage after soaking
- **STOP** soaking/using compresses when abscess starts draining

What about antibiotics?



- Take all antibiotics, if prescribed, even if you feel better
- Take antibiotics after you fix (if using heroin)
- Do not take antibiotics with alcohol, juice, or soda because they may upset your stomach
- Do not share antibiotics because someone else's pills may not cure your infection
- Return to the doctor if your infection is not better after taking antibiotics