

# WHAT PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COVID-19



## THE BASICS

- THIS IS A NEW ILLNESS. **YOU DO NOT HAVE IMMUNITY** FROM PRIOR FLU. This is not the flu.
- Most common symptoms include a fever (OVER 100.4), a dry cough, and shortness of breath
- Spreads through droplets in coughs and sneezes coming into contact with your eyes, nose, or mouth - **COVER YOUR MOUTH WHEN YOU COUGH/SNEEZE!**
- Just because you don't look sick, doesn't mean you aren't sick.
- Washing your hands or using hand sanitizer with over 60% alcohol kills the virus. Wash your hands whenever you get the chance.

## WHO IS AT RISK?

- People over the age of 65 are at the highest risk of fatality
- People with chronic lung disease (including asthma, COPD, etc)
- People living with HIV
- People who are otherwise immunocompromised, have a serious heart condition (prolonged meth use can lead to heart damage), liver disease (hepatitis causes liver damage), untreated diabetes
- People who smoke substances (including tobacco)

## DRUG SUPPLY

- We expect the drug supply to change in unpredictable ways. Travel restrictions may impact the flow of drugs. What you normally have access to may change in price or become harder to find. Grab extra fentanyl strips and narcan if possible.
- Stock up on substances, supplies, and medications as much as possible.
- Disinfect anything and everything you can. Try not to share smoking instruments, or get your own rubber tip mouth piece (at the syringe exchange) or use alcohol wipes to clean in between passes. Sharing cigarettes and picking them up off the ground is also a risk in transmitting the virus.

## ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF

- If you are experiencing homelessness, you are at high risk, especially if you have underlying health conditions. If you have any opportunity to get inside through a program or friends or family, now is the time.
- Ask methadone providers for take home doses. You shouldn't have to stand in line daily right now. They have some leeway from the federal government.
- In most states, syringe exchanges are deemed essential services through shut downs. Stock up. If you do not have access to a syringe exchange, don't forget pharmacies are open and you can at least get Narcan. Call ahead to see if they will sell syringes without a prescription.

## INCREASED RISK OF OVERDOSE

- Social isolation is dangerous and impractical for people living outside. Distancing from others increases risk of overdose.
- Decreased access to supportive care services like meals, sterile supplies, and a safe place to sleep put you at greater risk of overdose. Eat when you can, and try to sleep as much as possible when it's safe to do so.
- With increased access to methadone (SAMHSA approved 14-28 day take homes for "stable" patients) comes increased risk of overdose if people double up on opioids. Be careful with dosing and combining substances, especially if you are not regularly prescribed methadone or suboxone and are finding it more prevalent on the streets.
- Release from incarceration or using after any other period of abstinence puts you at significantly higher risk of opioid overdose because of lowered tolerance. If you were released to make space for quarantine, GO SLOW and make sure someone around you has narcan.