

Where to Get Your Abscess Seen

Abscess 411

Abscesses are a serious problem for people who shoot drugs. But what the hell are they and where can you go for care?

What are abscesses?

Abscesses are pockets of bacteria and pus underneath your skin and occasionally in your muscle. Your body creates a wall around the bacteria in order to keep the bacteria from infecting your whole body. Another name for an abscess is a “soft tissues infection”.

What are bacteria?

Bacteria are microscopic organisms. Bacteria are everywhere in our environment and a few kinds cause infections and disease. The main bacteria that cause abscesses are: *staphylococcus* (staff-lo-coc-us) *aureus* (or-e-us).

How can you tell when you have an abscess?

Because they are pockets of infection abscesses cause swollen lumps under the skin which are often red (or in darker skinned people darker than the surrounding skin) warm to the touch and painful (often VERY painful).

What is the worst thing that can happen?

The worst thing that can happen with abscesses is that they can burst under your skin and cause a general infection of your whole body or blood. An all over bacterial infection can kill you. Another super bad thing that can happen is an endocarditis, which is an infection of the lining of your heart, and “septic embolism”, which means that a lump of the contaminates in your abscess get loose in your body and lodge in your lungs or brain.



Why do abscesses happen?

Abscesses are caused when bad bacteria come in to contact with healthy flesh. One way this happens is through dirty injection practices. Bacteria can be easily be pushed into your body when you shoot up from dirty needles and equipment, from dirty hands and skin, or from dirty dope.

How come some people get abscesses all the time and other people never get them?

There are lots of reasons why some people are more prone to abscesses these include:

- ♦ Bad personal hygiene, especially injection hygiene, is the number one reason for abscesses.
- ♦ Muscling and skin-popping are also major reasons why some people get more abscesses than others. This is because bacteria won't grow in your blood like they do in your tissue.

If You Are Getting Treated Badly at the Doctor

Everyone deserves to get treated fairly when they get healthcare but almost every drug user knows a horror story about someone who was badly treated by a healthworker who either didn't know how to treat drug users or wanted to punish the person because they used. When you decide to go for care one suggestion is to bring a friend or loved one who can act as your advocate.

If you feel that you are being badly treated in a healthcare setting because you are a user or for some other reason (race, homelessness, cause' yer' poor) it is important that you complain, because they will never do anything about the situation if you don't.

Make sure to write a complaint as well as talk to someone in authority and be as calm and articulate as possible when you talk to people. Also make sure to site specific actions (like the nurse took people ahead of you or the doctor did not listen to you when you told her/him that you needed more pain meds) and not general impressions (“she don't like me”).

(reasons why some people get abscesses more than others continued)

- ◆ A “compromised immune system” can make you more susceptible to getting abscesses. This means that your body can’t fight off disease very well because of things like HIV, cancer, or constant stress.
- ◆ “Bacterial colonization” meaning the main bacteria on your skin are the ones that cause abscesses making it much, much more likely that you will get exposed to that kind of bacteria.

What can I do about an abscess if I get one?

The best thing to do is to keep the area clean and apply hot compresses or soak the area in warm water with Epsom salts. This will help increase the circulation in the area and either help the abscess to go away without opening or help bring it to a head so it will burst on its own.

If you open your own abscess:

Please use something CLEAN AND SHARP. The best thing is a scalpel or razor blade that has never been used. If you have to use something like a pocket knife make sure you heat it until it turns red-hot, this should mean that the blade is sterile. NEVER EVER use anything rusty or dirty (cause’ you could add tetanous to an already bad situation).

Clean your hands or wear gloves. Make one hole not more than an inch and a half long, in the swollen area that seems the softest. Squeeze all the pus out. Sometimes you will need to manipulate the area so that you open all of the pus pockets.

Use tissue to wipe away the pus and use soap and water, water and iodine, or salt water to clean the area. Do not use alcohol or hydrogen peroxide. Pack the wound with gauze, you do this so that the tissue can heal from the bottom out. Sometimes, if you don’t pack the wound, the top will heal over and the abscess will re-occur in the same place. If you don’t have gauze use clean cotton fabric. Do not use cotton balls or tissue because they will adhere to the wound. Cover the wound with more gauze or a clean cloth. Change the packing and clean it every day for about 5 days, then remove it and let it close. **Keep everything SUPER clean during this time.**

When do I need to go to the doctor?

Sometimes you MUST go to a doctor for help with an abscess. Here is what to look for:

- ◆ A dark red line running away from the abscess. This can indicate blood poisoning, which can kill you.
- ◆ A very high or persistent fever.
- ◆ A lot of pain.
- ◆ **If the area begins to lose any feeling or turn green or black.**

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How can I avoid getting abscesses?

There are A LOT of things you can do to avoid getting abscesses. But the number one thing you can do is to:

CLEAN YOUR SKIN BEFORE YOU SHOOT UP!!!!

- ◆ Clean your skin before you shoot. **Every time.** If you don’t have alcohol wipes, don’t worry- soap and water works just as well if not better!
- ◆ Wash your hands before you use, *every time.*
- ◆ If you can’t wash your hands use gloves or at least clean the tips of your fingers with swabs.
- ◆ Mainline, don’t skin or muscle dope!
- ◆ If you have to skin or muscle cut your dope with LOTS of water, not only will this help your body absorb the dope easier it will also get you well faster.
- ◆ Try to use a new rig each time you use.
- ◆ If you have to re-use your own rig make sure to clean it with bleach, soap and water, or if you don’t have those at least warm water.
- ◆ Mix your drugs on a clean surface! (like a piece of paper).
- ◆ Cook your drugs until they boil (about 10-15 seconds) this probably won’t kill HIV or Hep C but it does help kill bacteria.
- ◆ If you “pound” or “wash” cottons make sure to cook them **again** with extra water.
- ◆ NEVER EVER lick your point before you inject, your mouth is nasty.
- ◆ Only use water from clean sources like the tap, bottled water, or the waters they give at the needle exchange.
- ◆ Consider booty bumping or inhaling your dope.



To Booty Bump: Cook your drugs as usual. One comfortable position for this is to lie on your side with your leg pulled up toward your chest. Using a needle (with the tip broken off!) put them in your butthole. You may want to use a lubricant to make it easier. You will get high in about the same amount of time as you do muscling. You may find that using slightly more water than normal and/or making sure the mixture is warm helps it get you “well” faster!

To Inhale Your Dope: Cook your dope as usual but pour it into an empty nasal spray bottle and squirt it up your nose. Another benefit of this is that you can get a hit of dope almost anywhere without having to worry