



"Frying pans" are one of several supplies PPOP offers its clients for safer injection.



Lauren Gabrielle bends paper clips that will serve as handles on small frying pans used to dilute drugs before injection. Gabrielle volunteered with People's Harm Reduction Alliance in Olympia, Wash., before moving to Portland four months ago.

PIPES, from page 4

nation's first safe injection site in Seattle. (See Street Roots, "Seattle may get nation's first safe injection site," Dec. 11, 2015).

Shilo Murphy, executive director of this avant-garde nonprofit, said his organization decided to distribute meth pipes after numerous syringe-exchange clients said they were only injecting because they didn't have access to a glass meth pipe. People's Harm Reduction Alliance started distributing glass stems for smoking crack cocaine six years ago.

In November, the organization conducted an annual voluntary survey of its University District syringe exchange clients, and 93 of the survey takers self-reported meth use.

The surveyors asked the clients who reported that they both smoke and inject meth if they injected more or less frequently since the organization began distributing meth pipes. While 5 percent reported that they injected more, 46 percent said they injected the same amount, and 49 percent said they injected less often. Asked if they were smoking more often than before pipes were available at the exchange, 26 percent said they were.

While it wasn't a scientifically sound survey, it suggests that offering pipes to users who both smoke and inject meth may encourage less injecting.

"Injecting any drug can be more dangerous than smoking any drug because of the immediate issue of breaking the skin and introducing the risks of abscess, blood infection, nerve damage," said Kim Toevs, harm reduction manager at Multnomah County. "And, if one shares injection equipment, one is at very high risk for Hepatitis C infection, as well as Hepatitis B and HIV."

In Oregon, 21 percent of intravenous drug users test positive for Hepatitis C, with 58 percent of users ages 50 to 54 testing positive, according to a May 2015 report from the Oregon Health Authority.

Hepatitis C is a liver infection that, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, becomes a long-term illness in 70 percent to 85 percent of people who contract it. If it becomes a chronic infection, it can lead to serious health problems and in some cases death.

Studies show people who smoke methamphetamine and crack also have a higher prevalence of Hepatitis C than the general population, which has led to the "supposition" that disease transmission is occurring through pipe sharing, said Daniel Raymond, policy director at Harm Reduction Coalition in New York. The coalition advocates for harm reduction and offers training on a national level.

"They may have cracked lips, they may have burnt lips from the heat of the pipes, and there may be some blood that gets transferred on the pipe from one person to another," he said. While there's no slam dunk study showing access to meth pipes cuts down on disease transmission or that it will prevent people from transitioning to

"I continue to hear from service providers that if they don't have pipes available, people are asking for needles instead."

SARA YOUNG,
VANCOUVER COASTAL HEALTH HARM
REDUCTION PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

See PIPES, page 7

PHOTOS BY JOE GLODE