

Drug use in prisons

It is acknowledged that unauthorised drug use takes place within prison. Despite the range of drugs that might be available in prison, you should think seriously about the consequences of continuing to use drugs whilst in prison.

Getting into debt, being ripped off, having time added to your sentence for being caught with drugs, placing friends and family who visit you at risk by expecting them to bring drugs in, avoiding your problems, failing to qualify for enhanced status and the associated health problems are just some of the risks you run by continuing to use inside.

In partnership with community based agencies, the prison is making progress into developing drug treatments, education and rehabilitation programmes for those users who want to address the problems associated with their drug use. If you would like more information and advice, please speak to a member of the health care staff or your personal officer.

HIV and Hepatitis C - testing and treatment

Many people are worried about contracting a blood borne infection like HIV or Hepatitis. These viruses can be passed on by having unprotected sex and through sharing injecting equipment. Just because you have used drugs or had sex without a condom, it doesn't mean you are infected so try not to be too worried.

You may find it helpful to talk through your fears and concerns with a member of the health care staff. They can give you information and advice and also arrange tests to determine if you are HIV or Hepatitis positive. Testing can be done whilst you are in prison and the results will remain confidential.

Test procedure

A pre-test counselling session will be arranged to discuss the testing procedure with you. This is also a good opportunity to consider and discuss how you will deal with a positive test result and the effects this may have on your partner, family and so on. You have to wait three months after the last time you placed yourself at risk before having the test. It takes this long for your body to develop the antibodies, which the test looks for.

For the test, a small amount of blood (10ml) will be taken from you and sent off to the laboratory for testing. Once your blood sample is returned a post-test counselling session will be arranged to discuss your results.

You will need to sign a patient consent form prior to giving a blood sample.

If you test positive, you will be referred onto a doctor, who will discuss the types of treatment available to you.

Hepatitis B vaccination

Hepatitis B vaccinations are also available within prison. To have full protection from Hepatitis B you need three separate doses of the vaccine. It is important that you complete the course otherwise you will not have full protection. For more information, please talk with a member of the health care staff.

De-tox - coming off drugs

Detoxification essentially means getting rid of toxins (poisons) from your body. Because some drugs like heroin, alcohol and tranquillisers are physically addictive, your body can become used to having a regular supply of them. When you stop taking these drugs, it can become uncomfortable and painful, and in extreme cases life threatening, especially if you stop suddenly.

As part of the reception health screen procedure the healthcare officer will assess the need for a detox in consultation with the doctor.

A urine specimen is tested to confirm the presence of any drugs.

Pre-release counselling

The first few days and weeks after leaving prison is often the most telling. Though it would be nice to think that your drug problems will be left behind after you leave prison, its rarely that simple. Once you are back in the 'real world,' you may be tempted to use heroin or other drugs again. This is a risky situation and the likelihood that drug use will once again get the better of you is very high.

Pre-release counselling will be offered to you prior to your eventual release from prison. This is an opportunity to speak with a specialist drug worker. The worker will help you prepare for your new life on the outside and help you identify links with community-based agencies, for example the Alcohol and Drug Service offering support and guidance.

Pre-release counselling can also help with contacting outside agencies and organisations who may be able to help arrange accommodation, training, education or employment. You are strongly urged to take advantage of this service. Please see a member of the health care staff for more information.

Naltrexone (heroin blocker)

Naltrexone reduces or completely blocks the effects of opiates. If you take heroin whilst on Naltrexone, you will not experience any of the euphoric or pleasurable effects that heroin produces. Basically, if you use any opiate drugs while on Naltrexone nothing happens.

If you have a history of heroin use, and are coming to the end of your sentence, you will be offered Naltrexone in tablet form. Combining Naltrexone with a programme of counselling at the Alcohol and Drug Service, or other appropriate agency, will significantly improve your chances of leaving heroin and many of the associated problems behind.

There are bound to be times when you feel like a hit. Naltrexone provides you with a safety net, and helps you through those first few weeks and months when you may find it more difficult to cope.

Please remember, Naltrexone is not a form of punishment. By agreeing to a programme of Naltrexone in combination with counselling and support, you are more likely to succeed in leaving heroin behind. That's if you want to of course!

If you are concerned about returning to using heroin when you are released, and really do not want to, please see a member of the health care staff who may be able to help or advise you.

Drug testing

The prison operates a voluntary drug-testing programme. The purpose of drug testing is to:

- Provide the prison with information about the level of drug misuse amongst prisoners
- Identify those who have used drugs whilst in custody
- Identify problem drug users in need of help
- Discourage prisoners from using drugs.

Testing is targeted at prisoners on the enhanced wing and young offenders wing. Names are selected and prisoners will be chosen at random for testing. *If you test positive for drugs, you may incur:*

- Loss of privileges
- Non-entry to, or loss of your enhanced status. (Where additional privileges are available to you)

If you are found to be positive on a test, or fear that you might be, you are encouraged to seek help from a member of the health care staff or your personal officer.

Smoking cessation - NRT

If you wish to stop smoking whilst in prison, nicotine replacement therapy in the form of patches are available at a reduced cost from the health care staff.

