Anglicare TAS

Choice, support and hope

1800 243 232

anglicare-tas.org.au

The BBVAware Program is supported by the Crown through the Department of Health Tasmania.

Vein care

Identifying veins vs arteries, injecting tips

Veins

Never inject into an artery, be sure your needle is in a vein before attempting to inject intravenously.

Veins are blood vessels that carry blood from the extremities of the body back to the heart and lungs where it becomes re-oxygenated.

How to tell if you are in a vein:

- **Veins do not have a pulse**
- Vein blood is a deep, dark red (because it is low in oxygen).

When you inject into a vein, the blood will fill the syringe at a fairly slow pace, unlike injecting into an artery where the blood will fill a syringe at a faster pace.

Injecting successfully into a vein should NOT:

- **Be painful**
- Cause swelling

It won't require a lot of effort to push the plunger down (although larger barrels require more pressure).

Arteries

Arteries carry blood rich in oxygen from the lungs and heart to all the other parts of the body.

Arteries have a pulse, and are usually located deeper in the body, this makes them less visible than veins.

When you hit an artery:

- The blood in arteries will be **bright red** and **frothy** in appearance
- The blood will enter the syringe at a greater speed than when injecting into a vein
- You may feel **strange tingling electrical shocks** running down your arm – a similar feeling to putting your tongue on a low volt battery
- The plunger will require a lot of force to inject
- **Never keep trying to inject into an artery** but if you do it will be **painful, a sharp aching or burning**.
- The area will swell and/or bruise, possibly immediately
- You won't feel the taste instantly like you would when injecting into a vein.

Blood-Borne Virus Awareness

Needle and Syringe Program

For more information call Anglicare Tasmania on **1800 243 232** or scan the QR codes to visit our website.

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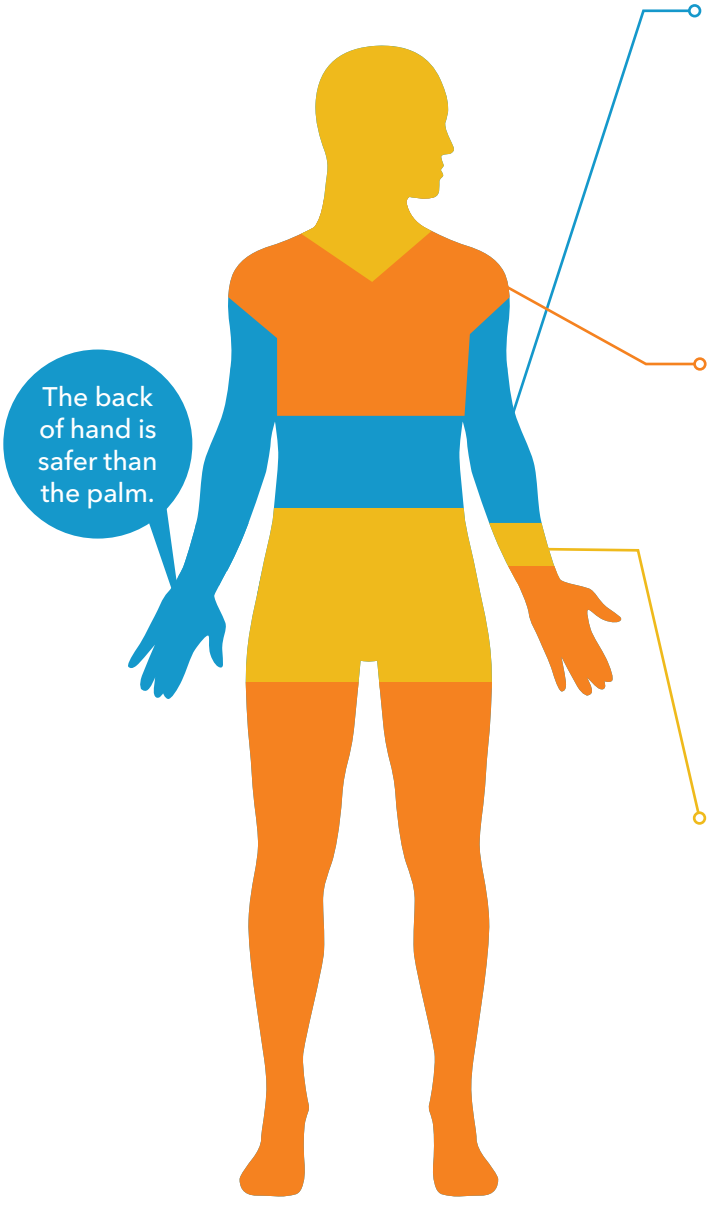
What to do if you accidently hit an artery?

- Stay calm, untie your tourniquet and pull your needle out immediately. **DO NOT KEEP INJECTING.**
- If possible, raise the limb above your head to stop the bleeding. Losing too much blood can be fatal or result in loss of limb.
- Apply firm pressure to the wound for 10-15 minutes. Do NOT use swabs to stem the flow as they will cause further bleeding.
- Seek medical attention if you experience any numbness, pins and needles, bleeding that restarts, or any increased swelling or pain.

What to do if you accidently inject into an artery?

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IMMEDIATELY.

Injecting into an artery can lead to gangrene and possibly amputation if left untreated for too long.



Lowest risk

Lower forearms are the safest place to inject. Always inject towards the heart – going with the blood flow.

Be aware that although a low risk area, the back of the hands have finer veins than the forearm and are easier to permanently damage.

Medium risk

If using your hands, remove rings and anything tight around the wrists. These veins are smaller so be gentle and go slow!

Veins take longer to heal in the feet and legs resulting in a higher risk of infection such as abscesses. Swab well. Injecting in the legs can result in varicose veins and deep vein thrombosis (DVT) in deeper veins.

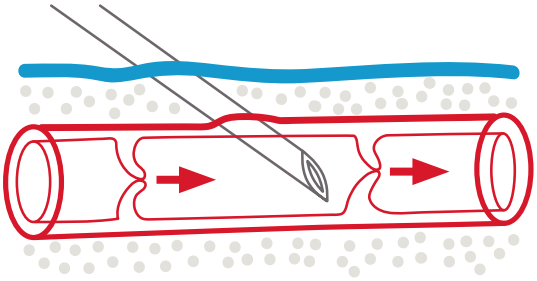
High risk

Please talk to your non-judgemental NSP Worker before attempting to inject in the neck or groin. These veins are very close to major nerves and arteries. Accidently hitting a nerve or artery can result in severe bleeding, permanent nerve damage, clotting and death.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is also a risk after continued use of these deep veins.

Correct needle position

- Inject with bevel (hole) facing upwards.



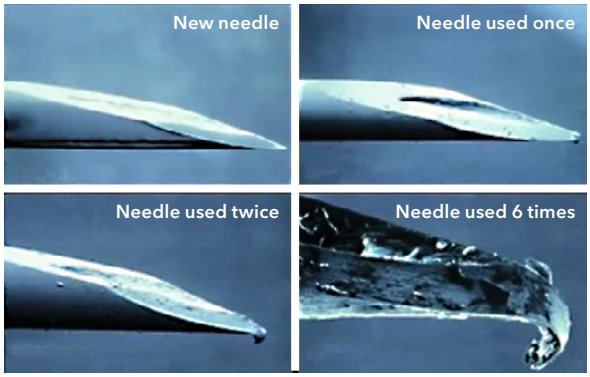
- Stop pushing the needle into the site as soon as blood appears in the syringe/needle.
- Pull the plunger back (jack back) slightly to confirm that there is blood flow.
- Put mild pressure on the plunger to inject. If correctly in a vein it should not take any effort to push the plunger down. Although larger syringes require more pressure as they increase in size.
- The plunger should move smoothly with no pain or swelling around the area.
- Use a clean tissue or cotton wool to stop any bleeding after taking the needle out. Don't use swabs after injecting – they will cause extra bleeding and more bruising.
- Make sure you appropriately dispose of all used equipment. This means chucking everything into a sharps bin. Sharps bins are available for free at all primary NSPs. Full bins can also be returned to primary NSPs.

Ask NSP Staff about the vein locator

Our vein locator can help you map out veins up to 1cm in depth and avoid areas where your veins branch off (bifurcations). We can't promise we'll find a vein but we can definitely work together to do our best.

Don't use the same site to inject every time. Rotating injecting sites will give your veins a chance to heal between tastes as well as lessen scar tissue, track marks and bruising.

After only one use, a needle sustains damage that becomes worse with further use. It's important not to reuse a needle because as they become blunt, they can tear and scar your veins.



Tricky veins?

- Jump in the shower to warm up. Blood thickens when you're cold making veins harder to find. Don't inject in the bath – if you pass out after a taste you could drown.
- Get your heart rate up – lift something heavy while running on the spot, or go for a brisk walk.
- **HYDRATE!!** Water is your veins best friend. For best results, drink at least 250mls of water 20 minutes before injecting. Water is better than sugary drinks, or have a hot drink instead!
- Take a break! If you're having a lot of trouble the best thing you can do is have a break. A break will help calm you down – frustration leads to mistakes. Drink some water while going for a quick walk.