



BC Centre for Disease Control  
Provincial Health Services Authority



# History of Harm Reduction Supply Program

Product indications & availability in BC  
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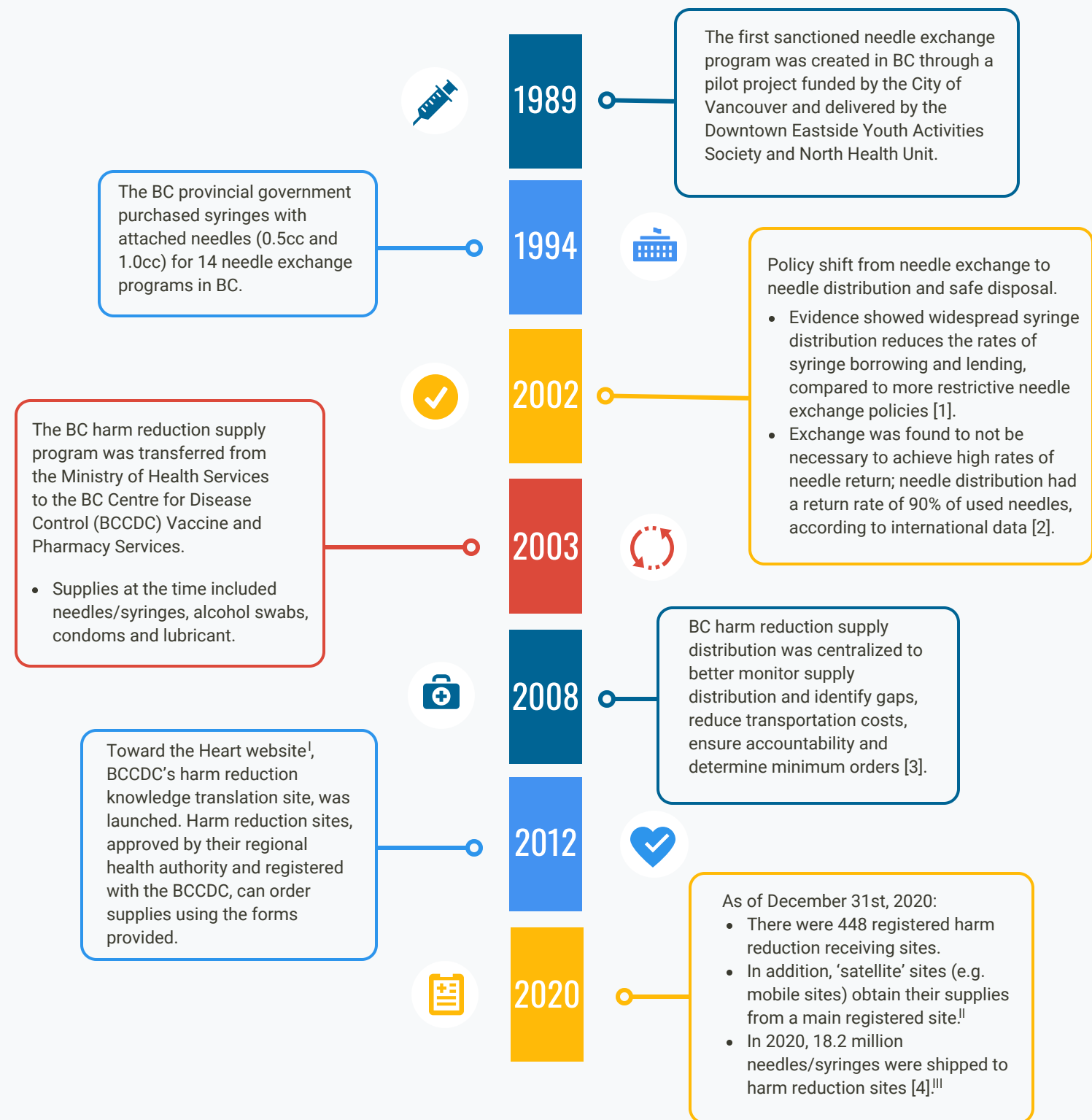
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## List of Acronyms

BCCDC	British Columbia Centre for Disease Control
DTES	Downtown Eastside
HA	Health Authority
HCV	Hepatitis C Virus
HRCS	Harm Reduction Supply Distribution Site Client Survey
MMHA	Ministry of Mental health and Addictions
MRSA	Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus
OERC	Overdose Emergency Response Centre
SCORE	Safer Crack Use, Outreach, Research and Education
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection

# History of the BC Harm Reduction Supply Program Administration



**Funding for harm reduction supplies is provided by the BC Ministry of Health through the Provincial Services Health Authority**

I. Toward the Heart website: <https://towardtheheart.com>

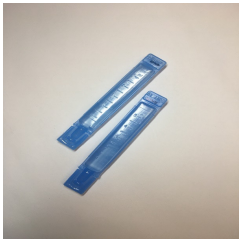
II. Note: Orders shipped to satellite sites are not tracked.

III. The supplies given to clients are not routinely recorded; therefore, the numbers reported represent the supplies shipped to receiving sites.

## Available Harm Reduction Supplies

A summary of the harm reduction supplies available through the BCCDC harm reduction program and dates when they became available is included in Table 1.

**Table 1 - Summary Harm Reduction Supplies Distributed through BCCDC and Indications**



Supply Product	Reasons for inclusion	Distribution started
<b>SAFER SEX</b>		
1. Condoms -lubricated & non-lubed  -flavoured & insertive <sup>IV</sup>	Providing safe sex options to reduce transmission of STIs and bloodborne pathogens, such as HIV and hepatitis. Younger populations or people doing sex work may prefer flavoured condoms. Internal or insertive condoms provide people with more options to protect themselves and others and are used for anal sex.	Available at program transfer to BCCDC  Available after transfer
2. Aqua lube	Reducing friction prevents mucosal tearing or unintended failure of barriers (breaking or not staying in place)	Available at transfer
<b>SAFER INJECTION</b>		
3. Syringes and needles	<p>The vast majority of needles and syringes distributed in BC are 0.5cc and 1.0cc syringes with attached needles. These needles/syringes have a low dead space<sup>V</sup> which reduces the likelihood of HIV and hepatitis transmission and reduces drug waste [5].</p> <p>3cc and 5cc syringe barrels without needles are also available with a variety of needle tip sizes to accommodate personal preference and diverse substances. Smaller gauge needles produce a smaller puncture wound and therefore minimize blood loss and the opportunity for infection to occur and may cause less discomfort. Individuals who have been injecting for a longer period of time may prefer thicker needle tips as these penetrate the built-up scar tissue more easily.</p> <p>Individuals who use anabolic steroids inject intramuscularly, which require thicker needles (lower gauge), hormone therapy injection requires intramuscular and subcutaneous injection [6].</p>	Available at transfer
4. Alcohol swabs	Alcohol swabs prevent bacterial infection by disinfecting the skin at the injection site. They can also be used to disinfect crack and meth pipes, mouthpieces, and for cleaning hands.	Available at transfer
5. Water vials 	Sterile, single use water in 3ml plastic ampoules was introduced to dissolve drugs for injection to prevent bacterial contamination, infections and abscesses from using water from unsterile sources such as puddles. Single use reduces the risk of sharing and transmission of bloodborne pathogens such as HIV and HCV.	2004

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IV. Other terms: female condoms, internal condoms

V. Dead space is the space between the needle and the plunger when it is fully pushed in i.e. the fluid that can't be expelled from the syringe

Table 1 - Summary Harm Reduction Supplies Distributed through BCCDC and Indications continued

Supply Product	Reasons for inclusion	Distribution started
<b>SAFER INJECTION</b>		
<p>6. Ascorbic acid<sup>VI</sup> -300mg sachets</p>	<p>Some drugs, such as crack cocaine and black or brown tar heroin require an acidic solution to dissolve the drug prior to injection. Lemon juice, a harsh acid which can cause pain, irritation, and damage to veins or vinegar were being used. These may be contaminated with bacteria and/or fungus. In 2010, single use sachets of 300mg ascorbic acid were introduced.</p>	2010
<p>-100 mg sachets</p> 	<p>It was identified that some people added the whole 300mg sachet of ascorbic acid rather than adding the least amount needed to dissolve the drug as recommended. Therefore, 300mg ascorbic acid sachets were replaced by 100mg sachets in 2014.</p>	2014
<p>7. Disposable cookers -Plain cooker</p>	<p>Non-sterile cookers or spoons may be contaminated with pathogens. Cookers are one of the items most often shared amongst individuals who use injection drugs and thus increases the risk of bloodborne pathogen transmission. This evidence was provided to support the introduction of individually packaged plain metal cookers.</p> <p>People with lived and living experience of substance use provided insights about disposal of used cookers. As cookers and filters maybe reused/shared it was recommended they be disposed of similar to injection equipment, such as in a sealed sharps collector.</p> <p>Filters remove fillers from tablet medications and other particles. Cigarette filters (may contain small glass particles and residue that could cause vein damage), Q-tips and cotton balls are nonsterile so may contain pathogens and cause cotton fever.<sup>VII</sup></p>	2010
<p>-Cooker with filter and dry swab</p> 	<p>Plain cookers were replaced by multi-coloured cookers, which include a dense sterile cotton pellet filter and a dry swab in the same sterile packaging. Coloured cookers allows people who are using together to identify their own cooker and reduce risk of unintentional sharing. The clear packaging allows people to select different colours before opening.</p>	2016

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VI. Other terms: Vitamin C, VitC

VII. Cotton fever: A benign, self-limited febrile syndrome characterized by fevers, leukocytosis, myalgias, nausea and vomiting, which may occur when cotton is reused as a filter.

Table 1 - Summary Harm Reduction Supplies Distributed through BCCDC and Indications continued

Supply Product	Reasons for inclusion	Distribution started
<p>10. Tourniquets</p> 	<p>Belts, shoelaces, ropes, and wire are used as 'ties' to make veins prominent to facilitate intravenous injection. These devices can cause vein and skin damage. A shortage of condoms in 2010 revealed that unlubricated condoms were also used as ties. Thus, latex-free quick release tourniquets were added to the supply. The tourniquets are easy to clean and should not be shared (to prevent transmission of skin infections such as MRSA) and should be replaced when visibly soiled.</p>	<p>2011</p>
<b>SAFER INJECTION</b>		
<p>11. Sharps collector<sup>VIII</sup> (0.5L &amp; 1.0L)</p> 	<p>Easy access to safe disposal options for used drug equipment in the community reduces needle litter in public spaces and needle stick injuries to the public. Municipalities often voice concerns about public needle litter, however many do not provide community sharps collection boxes.</p> <p>In 2011, the harm reduction program began to provide personal sharps containers. Disposal of used injection and inhalation drug equipment in sharps containers prevent reusing equipment as they cannot be retrieved. The 0.5L collector can contain up to 10 needle/syringes. As new syringes are used they can be disposed of in the used side of the container. The 0.5L size can fit in a pocket or purse; the 1.0L can be carried in a backpack.</p>	<p>2011</p>
<p>12. Sterifilt® Filters</p>  <p>Sterifilt Fast</p>	<p>Prescription and street tablets contain excipients - fillers, powders, coatings and wax that can damage the veins, skin, heart, and lungs if injected. Cotton pellets remove large particles, but Sterifilt® removes smaller particles. BCCDC worked with Health Canada, Drug Analysis Lab and determined the amount of active ingredient removed by Sterifilt® is minimal.</p> <p>In response to COVID-19, the Risk Mitigation Guidance<sup>IX</sup> was introduced to support health care providers to prescribe substances to help maintain isolation/quarantine and physical distancing and reduce distressing withdrawal symptoms of people with substance use disorder [7]. This includes prescribing pharmaceutical opioids such as hydromorphone/ Diluadid tablets. Individuals may choose to inject these tablets which contain excipients.</p> <p>Through the strategic direction of the Overdose Emergency Response Centre (OERC) and Ministry of Mental health and Addictions (MMHA), in December 2020, the BC Ministry of Health announced funding to make Sterifilts® available to reduce risks from tablet injection. BCCDC has developed informational resources including a video on how to use Sterifilts® [8,9].</p>	<p>2021</p>

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VIII. Other term: sharps container

IX. <https://www.bccsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Risk-Mitigation-in-the-Context-of-Dual-Public-Health-Emergencies-v1.6.pdf>

Table 1 - Summary Harm Reduction Supplies Distributed through BCCDC and Indications continued

## SAFER INHALATION

**SCORE:** The Safer Crack Use, Outreach, Research and Education (SCORE) Project was undertaken in Vancouver 2005-2008 with funding from Health Canada Drug Strategy Community Initiatives Fund. [10] SCORE grew out of the community based Safer Crack Use Coalition of Vancouver and was informed by women with living experience of crack use who participated in kit making circles. Crack kits included crack pipes, mouthpieces, brass screen and push sticks, condoms, lighters, alcohol swabs and a resource information card in a small black plastic bag were distributed and evaluated. Findings from SCORE project informed the request for safer smoking supplies in BC.


**BC 2019 Harm Reduction Supply Distribution Site Client Survey (HRCS) findings** n=621 [11]

- The reported preferred mode of substance use overall: smoking 63%, injecting 28% and snorting 4%.
- Of people using glass pipes, 32% reported using a second-hand pipe and 20% reported injecting when unable to find unused smoking equipment.
- Of those who reported using heroin: 73% reported smoking and 50% reported injecting.
- Of those using fentanyl: 67% reported smoking and 48% reported injecting.

**BC Coroners Service Mode of Consumption Report** in 2019 smoking was associated with about 40% of all illicit drug toxicity deaths, compared to 25% injected and 20% intranasal [12].

**COVID-19** was declared a public health emergency in BC in March 2020. Meanwhile, the toxicity of unregulated drugs increased, and illicit drug toxicity deaths rose to the highest ever recorded level [13]. The need to provide safer smoking supplies in order to prevent transmission of SARS CoV-2 through pipe sharing was shared with the Ministry of Health along with the evidence from HRCS and Coroners reports.

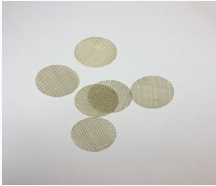
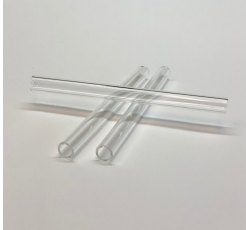

**In August 2020 the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions** announced \$10.5 million to expand access to overdose prevention sites including sites with inhalation options and funding for additional inhalation supplies [14].

Supply Product	Reasons for inclusion	Distribution started
<p>13. Wood push sticks</p> 	<p>The SCORE project identified that plungers from up to 1 in 5 syringes distributed through harm reduction program in Vancouver and ball point pens were used as push sticks [10]. Plastic push sticks may melt inside hot pipes and thus toxic fumes inhaled, and the attached needles and syringe barrels discarded causing litter. Wooden chopsticks used in the SCORE project were too long [10]. Therefore, the BCCDC harm reduction program began providing 6" round wooden sticks with flat ends for use as push sticks.</p> <p>Push sticks are used to pack and position the screen inside the crack pipe and move the screen back and forth to recover the crack that has hardened on the inside of the pipe after it cools. Wooden push sticks are less likely to chip the glass pipe compared to metal alternatives, such as coat hangers or car aerials thus reducing the risk of cuts on the lips or hands and of glass shards being inhaled.</p>	<p>2008</p>

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Table 1 - Summary Harm Reduction Supplies Distributed through BCCDC and Indications continued



Supply Product	Reasons for inclusion	Distribution started
<b>SAFER INHALATION</b>		
14. Plastic mouthpieces (small, medium, large diameter)	Mouthpieces prevent direct contact of the mouth with hot or broken glass stems which can cause oral lesions due to burns or cuts. Thus mouthpieces can reduce transmission of communicable diseases such as HCV, hepatitis B, and HIV [15-17]. Various diameters of food/medical grade vinyl tubing fit different size crack and meth pipes were introduced in 2008 in 100ft lengths is cut into lengths.	2008
15. Cutters	Cutters are provided to cut the vinyl tubing into individual lengths which are used for the mouthpiece.	2008
16. Brass screens 	Wire wool (Brillo®) is used as a screen to smoke crack but may break apart and hot metal particles may burn lips, mouth, and upper respiratory tract (be inhaled) [10]. Brass screens are provided by the harm reduction program as they are less likely to break apart and are not coated with potentially toxic substances.	2012
17. Tube glass <sup>X</sup> 8mm & 10mm 	<p>Sharing crack pipes has been implicated in transmission of respiratory diseases in BC. A 2006 pneumonia outbreak in the DTES was linked to sharing crack devices [18]; in 2007 a tuberculosis outbreak was linked to shared crack pipes [18]. New pipes can reduce the risk of injury from using cracked and chipped pipes; when pipes are hard to find people may share pipes or sell used pipes increasing the likelihood of disease transmission, including Covid-19.</p> <p>Heat resistant borosilicate glass (Pyrex) is stronger, less brittle, lasts longer and is less likely to explode when heated than conventional glass.</p> <p>Two sizes of tube glass became available to order in October 2020; Ministry of Health funding for tube glass is ongoing.</p>	2020
18. Bowl Pipes <sup>XI</sup> 	<p>People were heating tube glass (glass stems) to make bowl pipes and reported injury from glass exploding at high temperatures. People may use broken lightbulbs when bowl pipes are unavailable and risks cuts and other injuries.</p> <p>Bowl pipes became available to order in October 2020; Ministry of Health funding for tube glass is ongoing.</p>	2020

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X. Other terms: glass stem, crack pipe, straight shooter

XI. Other term: meth pipe

Table 1 - Summary Harm Reduction Supplies Distributed through BCCDC and Indications continued

Supply Product	Reasons for inclusion	Distribution started
<b>SAFER INHALATION</b>		
<p>19. Foil sheets (pre-cut 5"x7")</p> 	<p>Among 2019 HRCS participants using heroin and fentanyl, smoking was reported by 73% and 67% of respondents respectively. Foils are used to position and heat drugs that produce inhalable vapours. Household and store-bought aluminum foil may contain harmful chemicals and oils and may be thinner which risks the foil disintegrating and overheating the drugs. Providing foil sheets may also mitigate individuals from injecting drugs [19].</p> <p>Foils became available to order in October 2020; Ministry of Health funding for tube glass is ongoing.</p>	<p>2020</p>
<p>20. Straws</p> 	<p>People use items, such as crack pipes, to snort or inhale vapours, which can damage the inside lining of the nose. Single use straws are made available to reduce potential harms with snorting or inhaling substances and reduce sharing.</p> <p>Available straws are 3.5 inches (6mm in diameter), paper/bio-degradable, and provided in two colours (blue and yellow).</p>	<p>2021</p>

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