

Blue lights in public washrooms

The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) recommends against installing blue lights in public washrooms to discourage injecting drug use.

Background

Blue lights are sometimes installed in public washrooms to discourage injecting drug use. The lights are intended to visually obscure superficial veins, thereby making it difficult to inject drugs intravenously.

Discussion

- Blue lights are unlikely to prevent injecting drug use in public washrooms. While the lights reduce vein visibility, evidence indicates people will attempt to inject under blue lights when they feel confident in their injecting ability and where there are no suitable alternatives.
- Blue lights increase risks associated with injecting drug use. They promote unsafe practices such as deep vein injecting, which can be done without visual identification of the vein. People attempting to inject under blue lights may accidentally inject into an artery or into surrounding tissue. They may have trouble measuring and monitoring the amount they are injecting, thereby increasing overdose risk. Poor visibility increases the risk of blood borne virus transmission as it is harder to see and clean up any blood or bodily fluids.
- The installation of blue lights in public washrooms may lead to increased drug use in public places including nearby stairwells, alleys and parks. These alternative sites may increase safety risks experienced by people who use drugs. This also affects perceptions of public safety, and compounds the shame experienced by many people who inject drugs.
- Blue lights compromise health and safety for all washroom users as they reduce visibility, increase risk of trips and falls, make it harder to see and clean up hazardous waste, and prevent community members from carrying out basic personal hygiene, such as identifying changes in eye or skin tone, or the presence of blood or discoloration in bodily fluids.

Recommendations

Blue lights are unlikely to deter injection drug use and may increase associated harms including blood borne virus transmission, injecting related injury and disease, and overdose. They may also reduce health and safety among the broader community.

Businesses or other organizations with concerns about drug use in their washrooms are encouraged to connect with their local [harm reduction coordinator](#) for support in implementing best practice strategies for safer washrooms. This includes installing sharps disposal boxes in all washrooms, which decreases risks associated with inappropriately discarded needles.

References

Adapted with permission from Fraser Health's Fact Sheet - ['Blue Lights in Publicly-Accessible Washrooms'](#)

Crabtree A, Mercer G, Horan R, Grant S, Tan T, Buxton JA: A qualitative study of the perceived effects of blue lights in washrooms on people who use injection drugs. *Harm Reduction Journal* 2013, 10:(22) <http://harmreductionjournal.com/content/10/1/22>

Parkin S, Coomber R: Fluorescent blue lights, injecting drug use and related health risk in public conveniences: Findings from a qualitative study of micro-injecting environments. *Health & Place* 2010, 16:(4): 629-637 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2010.01.007>

Additional Resources

- Recommendations for safer and inclusive washrooms: <http://dtes.vch.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/10/VCH-DTES-Safe-Inclusive-Washrooms-Recommendations-Oct-2016.pdf>
- Suggestions for safer washroom protocols: <http://www.vch.ca/Documents/Washroom-Checklist-Service-Settings.pdf>