

# Public Health Warning: How to Use Heroin Safely

☒ Recently, I read an item in our local newspaper about a woman who overdosed on heroin at her home. Her brother broke down the door to her bedroom where she was found unconscious and not breathing. She was taken to the hospital. Right around that same time, my husband brought home a flyer he got at the Seattle courthouse from the King County Public Health Department which made my head spin.

The notice was issued by the Public Health Department and warned of several heroin-related deaths in King County. Nowhere on the notice did it say anything about getting off drugs, entering a rehab, referring individuals to N.A. meetings, or anything remotely addressing the problem of addiction.

Instead, it warned all users to treat all heroin as "suspect." The Department didn't know whether the deaths were caused by stronger heroin or a contaminant but said the deaths may have been caused by a "newer type of heroin" that's hard, brittle and dark in color.

Here's what the Department advised junkies to do in order to reduce the risk of an overdose and death:

**Don't use alone.** When you fix alone or behind a locked door, no one can help you if you overdose.

**Test for strength and quality.** When you use a new supply or dealer, do a tester shot first. Inject slowly.

**Tolerance.** If you have not used in a while, your body can't handle the same amount it did before. Start with a smaller amount. Do a tester shot.

**Mixing drugs.** Mixing heroin or other opiates with downers like benzos or alcohol can be deadly. Uppers and downers DO NOT cancel each other out!

**Naloxone.** Know how to use it! You can get naloxone at the Robert Clewis Center (downtown needle exchange).

If I hadn't seen the flyer, and my husband had told me about it, my immediate response would've been, "you're kiddin'?" By the way, Naloxone is a drug used to counter the effects of an opiate (heroin or morphine) overdose.

Apparently, we also have a 911 Good Samaritan Law in Washington because the flyer advises that "under WA law, if you think someone is **OVERDOSING** and you **SEEK MEDICAL HELP** for the victim, neither of you will be charged for **POSSESSING OR USING A SMALL AMOUNT OF DRUGS.**" Now isn't that comforting?

I don't know about you, but I find this whole thing very troubling. No where on the notice does the Public Health Department provide any information regarding addiction but rather almost encourages continued use by providing information on how to safely use heroin.

I've always known that Seattle is a very permissive city. It ties the hands of police officers, it allows bums to remain on the street annoying city dwellers and visitors alike, it permits these same bums to defecate and urinate around public buildings and bus stops, and, I clearly remember years ago seeing tables on street corners with people handing out "clean" needles. (I'm not sure if they still do that.)

I've always measured a city's safety by how I feel walking alone on its streets. I've walked alone on the streets in cities in America and Europe and I can honestly say that I've never felt comfortable walking alone in Seattle.

I hate to be cynical but my professional experience with drug abusers tells me that any heroin user who wants to shoot up

will shoot up and won't care about "using alone" or "testing for strength or quality."

This whole notice thing is legitimizing an illegal activity, kind of like telling an armed robber not to use bullets in his weapon.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.