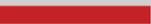
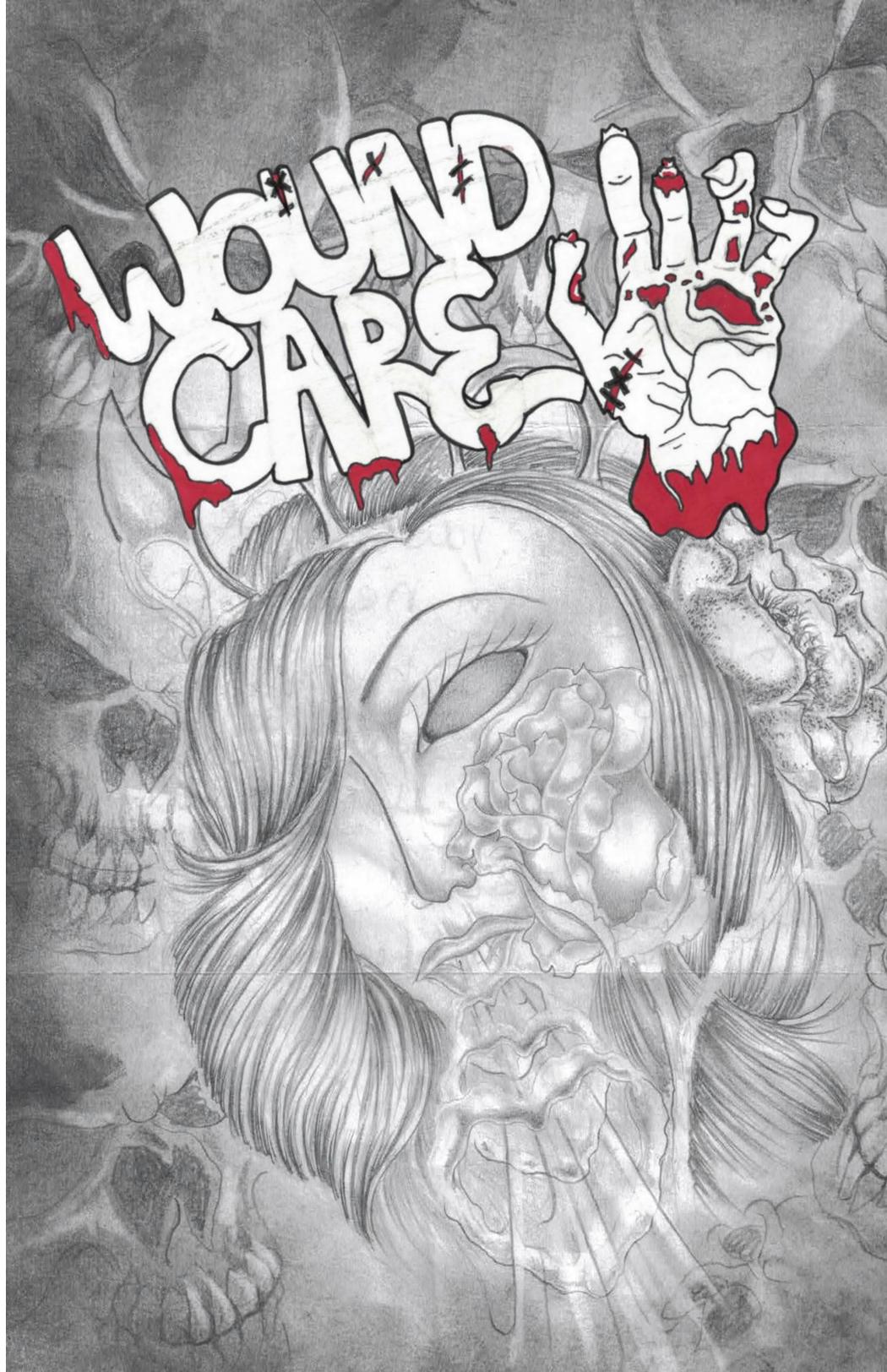


**Remember** – there is no wound fairy. If you've passed the point of self-care for a wound, be sure to go see a healthcare provider.



**HARM**   
**REDUCTION**   
**ACTION CENTER**



**Artwork by:** Sally, Cody Weinstock, Fish

**Special thanks to:** Harm Reduction Coalition for assistance with content, Harm Reduction Action Center PWID Advisory Committee, & Ruth Kanatser



# RESOURCES:

- **Getting off Right (Harm Reduction Coalition):**  
<https://harmreduction.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/getting-off-right.pdf>
- **Woundcare Zine (NEXT Distro):**  
[https://issuu.com/nextdistro/docs/zine\\_wound\\_care\\_web\\_110118/12](https://issuu.com/nextdistro/docs/zine_wound_care_web_110118/12)
- **New Hampshire Harm Reduction Coalition:**  
<http://nhhrc.org/skin-care-guide-people-inject-drugs/>



# SAFE INJECTIONS

## infections AND CARE

### Cellulitis

With cellulitis, the bacteria enter the skin. Cellulitis may spread rapidly. Affected skin appears swollen and red and may be hot and tender. Skin impacted by cellulitis often appears “orange like” in toughness and consistency, mimicking that of the skin of an orange.

*Without treatment* with an antibiotic, cellulitis can be life-threatening.

### Blood Poisoning

Sepsis occurs when chemicals released in the bloodstream to fight an infection (like staph) trigger inflammation throughout the body. This can cause a cascade of changes that damage multiple organ systems, leading them to fail, sometimes even resulting in death. Symptoms include fever, difficulty breathing, low blood pressure, fast heart rate, and mental confusion.

*Treatment* includes antibiotics and intravenous fluids.

### Tetanus

Tetanus is a potentially fatal bacterial infection that affects the nerves. A vaccine can easily prevent the infection, which has no cure. Tetanus causes painful muscle contractions, particularly in the jaw and neck. It can interfere with the ability to breathe, eventually causing death.

*Treatment* focuses on managing complications.

### “Cotton Fever”

Symptoms occur soon after injecting:

- Chills, fever, shaking, hot flashes, nausea, headaches, difficulty breathing.
- Caused by the bacteria that live in used cotton filters, \*not\* caused by injecting cotton fibers.
- Uncomfortable but not usually serious, however you should go to the ER if symptoms last longer than 4 hours.

# SAFE INJECTIONS

## infections AND CARE

### Staph/Strep/MRSA

Staph can be spread person-to-person and is very contagious. Common symptoms include boils and oozing blisters. In rare cases, staph infections can turn deadly if the bacteria invade deeper into the body or enters the bloodstream resulting in fever, joint, and muscle pain.

Treatment often includes drainage of the infection and antibiotics. Strains of staph that no longer respond to common antibiotics are called MRSA.

### Endocarditis

Endocarditis is an infection of the endocardium, which is the inner lining of your heart chambers and heart valves. Endocarditis generally occurs when bacteria, fungi or other germs from another part of your body, such as your mouth, or from your skin while injecting and spread through your bloodstream and attach to damaged areas in your heart.

### Osteomyelitis

Infections can reach bones by traveling through the bloodstream or spreading from nearby tissue. Common symptoms include pain, fever, and chills.

Treatment is usually surgery to remove portions of bone that have died. This is followed by strong antibiotics, often by an IV, for at least six weeks.

## Foreign Bodies / "Missing"

Any time something "solid" (or your drug solution) gets under your skin/outside the vein it can cause an "abscess."

- These types of wounds DO NOT NEED antibiotics, but they do need to be kept clean and covered until the draining stops.

# PREVENTION

## OTHER TIPS TO KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR ABSCESS:

- The vast majority of wound care issues can be prevented utilizing an alcohol prep pad prior to injecting (& washing your hands or using BZK wipes).
- Use saline or warm water to pull off old gauze so you don't damage healing tissues recover with clean dry gauze and tape or ace.

### **DO NOT squeeze the pocket to try and get the puss out.**

- You could push the puss into your blood stream instead of out and cause blood poisoning or worse. Instead you can gently rub the very outer edges of the wound inward to help facilitate draining.

# Signs, Symptoms, and Self Care

**Increasing swelling, redness, fever/heat, and pain are ALWAYS signs of infection.**

## GO TO THE DOCTOR IF:

1. If you know you didn't "miss" the shot, if it is rapidly getting worse, or if you have an actual FEVER. 100.1 or higher is a sign of serious infection (especially if you take Advil or Tylenol and the fever comes back).
2. Also go in if you don't know if you missed or not, or if the abscess comes up in a place you never injected. This is a sign bacteria is traveling through your blood stream and "seeding" wherever it wants which is dangerous. If you are also experiencing chills and extreme fatigue you **MUST GO IN** for care.

## SELF CARE IF:

Draw a circle around the outer edge of swollen area. If it swells outside of the circle in the next 24 to 48 hours, it is NOT going to get better on its own.

If you have used the circle (and a hot compress) method and it is getting "better"- less red, less swollen, draining puss but is not very foul smelling and all your tissues look healthy (no red streaks running up the limb or green or black skin tissue), then you do not need to see a doctor.

Keep it clean and covered until it stops draining.