

## Harm Reduction Services (cont.)

Youth Services/Harm Reduction Sites in Toronto  
CAMH (Addiction Medicine Clinic)  
(Spadina Ave. & College St.)  
33 Russel Street  
Tel: 416-535-8501 ext. 6019

St. Michael's Hospital  
(Emergency Department)  
(Victoria St. & Shuter St.)  
30 Bond Street  
Tel: 416-864-5094  
\* 24-hour needle exchange provided

South Riverdale Community Health Centre  
(Counterfit Harm Reduction Program)  
(Queen St. E. & Carlaw Ave.)  
955 Queen Street East  
Tel: 416-461-1925 ext. 240  
Mobile: 416-451-1951

The Works (Yonge St. & Dundas St. E.)  
277 Victoria Street, Ground Floor  
Tel: 416-392-052

## Contact Us

Please contact us for further information.

Centre for Student Development and Counselling  
416-979-5195  
[www.ryerson.ca/counselling](http://www.ryerson.ca/counselling)

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# Harm Reduction



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# What is Harm Reduction?

- Harm reduction involves policies and programs that are implemented to reduce unwanted factors that may arise from the use of legal and illegal psychoactive (mind-altering) drugs, without actually reducing the substance abuse problem
- Harm reduction presents a realistic approach, aiming to “reduce the harm” posed by illicit substances
- Harm reduction not only benefits the individual using the drugs, but their families and communities as a whole

## Common Misconception

People think that if harm-reduction programs are implemented, there will be an increase in the use of illicit substances. Research comparing the Netherlands (marijuana is legalized) and the United States, the lifetime prevalence of smoking marijuana was 32% among residents in San Francisco, but only 12% in Amsterdam, where the laws surrounding marijuana use is more liberal.

### What's a Safe Injection Site?

Worldwide, there are about 40 to 50 legal supervised injection facilities. The first one opened in North America in 2003 specifically Vancouver, BC. Users of illicit drugs can come to inject under closely monitored medical supervision. Supervised injection sites have shown to reduce various diseases as mentioned above, reduce overdoses, and benefit the overall health of the community.

### Goals of Harm Reduction

The primary goal of harm reduction is to reduce and prevent further injury from occurring in association with substance abuse (Beirness et al., 2008). Harm Reduction recognizes that individuals may not be willing or may not have the will power to discontinue drug use and that being non-judgemental is key in assisting individuals to reduce risky behaviours (Beirness et al., 2008). Harm reduction serves as an approach to ensure that there are a variety of options available to reduce harms associated with their continued use that may affect themselves, and members of the community. Harm reduction collaborates individuals with treatment and rehabilitation services as needed. (Beirness, et al., 2008)

### What do Harm Reduction Programs Look like?

- Support for modifying drug policies: legalization, decriminalization, terminating illegal substance prohibitions, reducing penalties for drug-related crimes.
- HIV/AIDS related interventions: needle and syringe exchange programs, HIV prevention and intervention services, referrals for HIV testing and HIV medical and psychosocial care.
- Broader drug treatment options: methadone maintenance by physicians, changes in methadone policies, heroin substitution programs.
- Drug-abuse management for continuing users: counselling and clinical programs promoting safety and responsibility.
- Additional interventions: housing, healing centres, support groups.

### Does Harm Reduction Really Work?

Significant outcomes associated with needle exchange programs include reduction in high risk behaviours such as needle sharing, minimizing the amount of HIV infections, which thereby reduce costs in the health care system. Needle exchange programs may serve as a pathway for individual users to be involved in treatment and prevention interventions. Research conducted revealed that these sites reduced risk harms in correlation with injection drug use that resulted in improper syringe disposal, injecting in public environments and there was a decline in criminality and public order issues.

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### Helpful TIPS On How To Reduce Harm

- Smoking, swallowing, and snorting is more reliable than injecting because there are less risk associated with it such as contracting a sexually transmitted infection if the needle is dirty.
- If you decide to inject then ALWAYS use new injection equipment for each hit.
- Avoid mixing drugs with other drugs as well as with alcohol
- Practice safe sex

### Harm Reduction Services

Services are available by Toronto Public Health which are administered by various agencies through mobile vans, drop in health centres and street outreach programs. The following are examples of services available:

- Needle and Condom Distribution
- Low Threshold Methadone Maintenance Program
- HIV and Hepatitis C Testing
- Mobile Outreach Programs
- Sexual Health Programs
- Counselling and Referrals

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