

## The bleach procedure

Only in a few countries do national recommendations and provisions exist regarding the use of disinfectants. Whilst the introduction of bleaching agents would be welcome in all prisons – since proper bleaching is better than doing nothing at all – experience of bleaching practices outside prison shows that they are idiosyncratic even when optimum conditions exist. The nature of the prison environment means that cleaning and bleaching of injecting equipment will often be unsatisfactory, simply because the resources and opportunity will not be available. It is recommended not to use 'Natriumhypochlorit' (NaHClO) because of its chemical instability, so iodophore disinfectants are more effective. But using Natriumhypochlorit seems to be better than nothing at all. Dispensing bleach should also be accompanied with specific information during the reception phase of admission to the prison.

In Scotland, sterilising tablets are given to prisoners with instructions on how to use them for sterilising mugs, cutlery, razors, chamber pots and injecting equipment.

**Material required:** Use bleach (Natriumhypochlorid in household bleach) in the highest available concentration, cup or bowl.

**Duration:** If all equipment is at hand the bleach procedure takes about 5 minutes.

**Procedure:** 2 x water " 2 x bleach "2 x water.

- Pre-rinsing: draw up cold clean water through the needle until the syringe is completely filled and then squirt it out in the gutter or toilet. Repeat this.
- Draw up bleach through the needle into the syringe, add some air and shake for 30 seconds, then squirt it out. Repeat this and don't forget to shake again for 30 seconds.
- Rinsing: draw up cold clean water through the needle until the syringe is completely filled and squirt it out in the gutter or toilet. Repeat this.
- Splashes: If your eyes or face are splashed with the liquid, rinse it off with fresh tap water to minimize irritation
- Mixing: Mixing the liquid or tablets with other cleaning products may reduce their effectiveness

### Advantage:

- The bleach procedure is inexpensive and quick (about 5 min.).



**Disadvantage:**

- The larger the amount of blood in the syringe, the greater the chance that the bleach procedure will not be safe. So pre-rinse well with water and do not forget to shake the syringe filled with bleach, thoroughly.
- The limited tenability of bleach. As it reacts with oxygen, bleach loses its disinfecting quality after three to four weeks.
- Bleach is not accessible in all European prisons and is not accepted as a substance for disinfection in all European countries. This is an indication that bleaching is not 100% safe.
- Bleach can damage some types of syringes.

**For maximum safety:**

Take the syringe into parts after the disinfection and rinsing, and put it in a bath of bleach for one hour.

*Shaking a syringe for 30 seconds does not seem very long, but in fact it is, especially when one is withdrawing and in need of drugs. It is instructive to shake a syringe for 30 seconds when one is not in need to get a sense of the timescale involved.*

