

Handling of Suspected Illicit Substance Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the definition of an illicit substance? **Anything suspicious and unlabeled in the patient's possession which you reasonably suspect to be a controlled substance for which the patient does not have valid prescription**
2. What is the first thing I should do if I suspect a patient has an illicit substance in their possession? **Notify your supervisor and request the patient/family to remove the substance from the facility if safe to do so. A patient may also be requested to leave the facility if they are ambulatory, refusing or unable to surrender the substance, and where withholding health care would not pose an immediate risk to their health. Only search the patient and seize the product if required within the context of providing care and to prevent an immediate and serious threat to staff, patients or visitors.**
3. How does this policy apply to substances that are legal but for which the patient does not have a doctor's order (for instance, marijuana purchased from legal source)? **Recreational marijuana is legal to purchase/possess if over 19 years of age. Minors would be asked to remove the substance from the facility. Medical marijuana needs a prescription and procedure followed as per policy.**
4. We allow patients to carry and use cigarettes containing nicotine on them. Would this not be inconsistent with our policy on other illicit substances? **Cigarettes are legal to purchase if over 18 years of age. Minors would be asked to remove the substance or have it locked away by staff per policy.**
5. What do I document if a patient enters the hospital with an illicit substance but sends it home with family? **In the chart, document the care of the client and verbal consent was given on removal of the product, without identifying the type of substance on the IPN. NOTE: if the substance is involved with the reason for client seeking care at the facility, then the specific type of substance, if identified by the client may be documented in client record. Also complete An Occurrence report.**
6. What do I document if the substance is removed from the patient and taken to pharmacy? **Fill out Transfer Form and an Occurrence report.**
7. When do I need to complete an occurrence form? **Only if an illicit substance is found with client & either removed or voluntarily surrendered to staff & sent to pharmacy.**
8. How do I package the illicit substance with tamper proof packaging? **Tamper proof packaging may include stapling of bag, tape with initials on opening or the utilization of a tamper proof seal/tag.**

9. Why can we not label illicit substances with the patient's name? **We are not the police therefore legally we cannot identify the unknown substance to a person.**
10. What if I work at a regional site with multiple units and two of these units deal with an illicit substance simultaneously and assign the same number to both packages? **This would be very rare. Although we could use an identifier for the unit to be added to the identifier label.**
11. Who is responsible to transport the product to the pharmacy? Can I send it with an HCA or unit clerk? **Leave substance in locked cupboard on unit & call pharmacy to come pick up substance.**
12. Can I document the name of the substance if the patient has informed me of what it is? **NO, only document the type of substance if it is pertinent to client's care in hospital.**
13. Where does the Suspected Illicit Substances Transfer form go? Do I place a copy in the patient's chart? **Keep form with substance at all times. No DO NOT leave a copy on client's chart.**
14. What if a patient surrenders product but later asks to have it given to family? **It may not be returned to client, unless they request it from local police within 4 weeks of discharge from hospital.**
15. What information should I give the patient or family if they wish to recover product which has been removed by hospital staff? **The client will need to disclose themselves to police for the return of the product.**
16. Under what circumstances do I need to contact law enforcement? **Whenever the presence of a suspected illicit substance threatens the safety of staff, patients, or visitors.**
17. Does anything change if the patient is a minor? Do I have to contact their parent/legal guardian? **Follow the same procedure. The police will deal with the implications of a minor. It is not necessary to contact their parent/legal guardian unless they are needed with the care of the minor.**