Black Tar Smack Attack

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East Coast heroin users who can’t kick the habit should be California dreamin’: A December 2003 UCSF study reports that along the West Coast, injection-drug users experience rates of HIV infection drastically lower than their Eastern counterparts’. Indeed, in the early ’90s, 4 percent of LA users tested positive compared to 40 percent in New York City. Many Left Coasters use viscous, black-tar heroin—which, to permit injection, they must cook at the HIV-killing temp of 165 degrees. Easterners, meanwhile, use primarily a white or light-brown powder, which requires less heat. What’s more, black tar can harden veins, complicating injection and pushing users toward less risky, nonintravenous ingestion. Tar clogs syringes, too, requiring frequent rinsing and disposal. Bottom line: If it can’t be nixed, give your fix a good cook and rinse. And that’s from sea to shining sea.

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