

## HIV and men - safe sex

In Australia, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is most commonly spread through unprotected anal or vaginal intercourse with an infected person. If you are HIV positive, you should talk with your doctor or local HIV/AIDS organisation for further information and advice.

### HIV transmission

HIV is transmitted by body fluids including blood, ejaculate (cum), pre-ejaculate (pre-cum), female genital fluids (both vaginal and cervical fluid), breast milk and anal mucous.

The way the virus gains entry to another person may be directly across the mucosa (the lining of the vagina or bowel) or into the bloodstream. HIV can also pass from mother to baby during pregnancy or birth, or via breast milk.

Transmission can occur from men to women and from women to men as well as between men who have sex with men.

The best way to stop HIV transmission is to always use a condom when having sex.

### Safe sex

Safe sex is sex where semen, vaginal secretions or blood are not exchanged between sexual partners. It is important to prevent the transfer of these body fluids, whether the man or his partner is HIV positive. Be guided by your doctor or health worker, but safe sex suggestions include:

- Kissing, cuddling, masturbation, mutual masturbation, massage, and ejaculating or urinating on unbroken skin.
- Always wear a condom and use a water-based lubricant when having vaginal or anal sex.
- The woman may prefer to wear a female condom that is inserted into the vagina.
- The withdrawal method is not a safe sex alternative as the pre-ejaculate (pre-cum) of an HIV positive man may transmit the virus.
- Oral sex with either a man or woman is considered a 'low-risk' activity for transmission of HIV. The risk increases when people have cuts or sores in their mouth or on their lips, or have recently brushed or flossed their teeth. To ensure oral sex is a no-risk activity, people may choose to use a condom or a dental dam during oral sex.
- Avoid penetration of the vagina or anus with finger or fist if there are abrasions on the hand or arm. To be sure that this is a safe sex activity, wear a latex glove and use lots of water-based lubricant.
- Don't share penetrative sex toys such as dildos. It's best to have a separate collection for each partner. You should also cover them with a new condom each time they are used, or wash them thoroughly in warm soapy water between partners.

### Some tips to consider

Negotiating safe sex is not always easy. Here are a few tips that may help.

- Have condoms handy if you think there is a possibility that you will be having sex.
- Don't assume that your partner will take responsibility for having condoms. Make sure you have condoms with you.
- Don't assume that your partner will feel confident about using condoms. Everyone should learn how to use them correctly.

- Make it your business to find out about condoms. Condoms come in a range of different sizes, shapes, styles, colours and flavours to suit personal preferences and enhance pleasure. It is important to investigate what is best for you and your partner.
- Find out where you can get condoms without embarrassment.
- Negotiate safe sex before you get into the 'heat of the moment'. This is usually not the best time for debate and discussion.

## What to do if you are exposed to body fluids

If you are exposed to body fluids, you should wash the skin or area thoroughly with soap and water. Don't use a douche in the rectum as this can irritate the area and increase the risk of HIV transmission. See your doctor for further information and advice.

Post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is a month-long course of medications for people who have been exposed to the HIV virus. To be most effective, they should be commenced within 72 hours of exposure. It is best to take them as early as possible after exposure. These drugs can be toxic on the body with unpleasant side effects such as vomiting, nausea and lethargy. PEP is not an alternative to safe sex.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV or think you need advice, call 1800 889 887. This is a 24-hour information telephone service, available in nine languages and with an optional interpreter service if required.

Clothes, bedding or other material can be washed in water and detergent or dry cleaned.

## Don't share toothbrushes or razors

Everyday household contact doesn't transmit the HIV virus, but the intimacy of a sexual relationship means that lovers tend to share personal items, which can be a risk. Avoid sharing toothbrushes, razors or any other personal items (including injecting equipment) that could have come in contact with blood.

## Long-term relationships for serodiscordant couples

Describing a couple as 'serodiscordant' means that one partner is HIV positive and the other is not. This can raise a number of issues, such as how to have sex safely. The term 'safe sex' seems to conjure up thoughts of condoms and not much else.

It is normal for people who are in a serodiscordant relationship to become frustrated and angry about limitations on their sexual expression. You might even think that it's not really worth it. Being honest with your partner about your feelings and talking will help to each of you get through these difficulties. In any relationship, communication is the key.

For the HIV-positive person in the relationship, issues can be totally different to those of the HIV negative person. Fears around transmitting HIV to your sexual partner are real and sometimes these fears may need to be addressed by a professional counsellor. It is helpful to remember these fears are occurring because the partner cares.

The negative person may also have fears associated with contracting HIV, or of family or friends finding out about their partner and what their reaction might be. These fears may also be helped by talking to a professional counsellor.

Talking to other people living with HIV about these issues may be helpful. People Living with HIV/AIDS Victoria, Straight Arrows and Victorian Aids Council Victoria are community support organisations that have peer support workers.

## Where to get help

- Your specialist HIV doctor
- Victorian HIV/AIDS HIV Outpatient Clinic Tel. (03) 9076 6081
- Straight Arrows Tel. (03) 9863 9414.
- People Living with HIV/AIDS Victoria. Tel. (03) 9863 8733.
- HIV & Sexual Health Connect Line Tel. 1800 038 125 or TTY (for the hearing impaired) 1800 555 677 or 13 14 50 for interpreter service

- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9341 6200 or 1800 032 017 (Toll free from outside Melbourne metropolitan area only) or TTY (for the hearing impaired) (03) 9347 8619
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre HIV Clinic for HIV positive people only Tel. (03) 9341 6214
- VAC/GMHC Clinic Tel. (03) 9525 5866
- PEP Tel. 1800 889 887

## Things to remember

- The HIV virus is transmitted by body fluids including blood, ejaculate (cum), pre-ejaculate (pre-cum), vaginal and cervical fluids, and breast milk.
- It is important to prevent the transfer of the HIV virus in these body fluids whether the man or his partner is HIV positive.

### **This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

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