

Safer Sex Guide

HIV+



MESMAC
NORTH EAST

This booklet provides up to date information and advice about sex so you can make your own choices about the kind of sex you have. There are many issues involved, and this booklet can only be a starting point. At the back there's a list of organisations that will be able to look in more detail at these issues with you.

There's nothing wrong with having lots of sex, or no sex at all. The information here may help you decide to change the kind of sex you have.

You don't have to give up things which give you pleasure, but you may decide to weigh up the pleasure and the risks involved. Everyone is responsible for their own sexual health and practicing safer sex. This applies to everyone, regardless of their status - positive, negative or untested.

Sex

For a time after being diagnosed HIV+, many men don't have sex.

There's nothing wrong with that. Maybe they've lost their libido, are feeling depressed, are still coming to terms with their diagnosis, or sex represents the way in which they were infected. In time, most positive men restart an active sex life. Some men choose not to have sex again because they believe it will put their partner at risk, there's nothing wrong with this - it's all down to personal choice.

If you're an HIV+ man who's sexually active, you need to know about the risks involved in certain kinds of sex, and what you can do to minimise those risks. Then you can make your own informed decisions about what you're prepared to do, while still getting the most pleasure possible.

How safe, secure, and happy you feel about the sex you're having can have a big effect on your general well being.

Condoms

It's not a very good idea for anyone, regardless of their HIV status, to have unsafe sex with someone whose status they're unsure about, or don't know.

Using condoms and water-based lube for fucking is still the best way to protect yourself, and others, in most circumstances.

Even if your viral load is undetectable, you still have HIV and it can be passed on during sex. Some HIV+ men decide to give up condoms when they have sex with men they know to be positive. This may be because they enjoy it and might have already decided that they can't get anything worse than HIV.

This has to be an individual choice where both of you weigh up the benefits of not using a condom against the possible medical risks. Fucking without condoms may mean that you could catch, or even pass on other types of HIV; these may already be resistant to some HIV treatments (see Different Types of HIV). It could also mean you're more likely to catch sexually transmitted infections (STI's) and so increase the risk to your health.

There's more information about STI's later in this booklet.

Research shows that men who have sex with men often make the wrong assumptions when they're trying to guess someone else's HIV status. For instance, some positive men may think that people who don't want to use condoms must be positive too, or because someone is healthy and good looking that they must be negative. However, it's also been shown that HIV+ men are usually more aware of the risks involved, and are great educators on safer sex issues, but this doesn't place the sole responsibility for safer sex on the shoulders of HIV+ gay and bisexual men. Safer sex is everybody's responsibility.

Safer Sex Guide

In any given situation, we've all got choices and responsibilities.

They should depend on what you know about yourself and your partner, and not on assumptions that you may both make about HIV status. No one should pressurise you into having sex you don't want and you'll need to think about all the options open to you before you make your decision.

Whatever you decide, you may find it useful to talk through your decisions with someone with HIV knowledge, a counsellor, or someone else with HIV.

The following is a guide to the most common kinds of sex, the risks involved, and what you can do to ensure a safer and healthier sex life.

Fucking

Unprotected fucking can expose you and your partner to a wide variety of sexually transmitted infections (STI's), hepatitis and different strains of HIV. Using condoms and water-based lube greatly reduces those risks. You don't have to stop fucking if you're HIV positive and if you take care you'll reduce the risk of exposing negative partners to HIV.

Sucking

For HIV+ men there are more risks involved in sucking than there are for negative men. This is because the diseases you can get from oral sex can be more serious for people with weakened immune systems.

Although it may be tempting, it's better not to brush your teeth

before or after you have oral sex. This lowers the amount of saliva in your mouth, which may be quite good at killing the virus and also increases the chances of damaging your gums. As far as HIV transmission is concerned, sucking carries a much lower risk than fucking without a condom. Sucking becomes more dangerous if you've got bleeding gums or ulcers/open sores. Similarly, if the person being sucked has cuts or sores on his cock, infections can be passed on. Although sucking is relatively low risk, it's safer not to cum in the mouth.

The man doing the sucking is at most risk, but some infections (other than HIV) can be passed to the man being sucked. If sucking makes you anxious, you may prefer to use flavoured condoms for oral sex and this'll help to prevent other infections such as herpes or gonorrhoea.

Sex Toys

Don't share them unless they've been thoroughly washed with soap and hot water. However, if you're sharing dildos and you're unable to wash them, then you can use condoms provided that you use different condoms each time you use the dildo on a different person.

Rimming

Oral anal sex can carry a higher risk of infection for HIV+ men, mostly because of the possible exposure to bacteria and other infections such as cryptosporidium and salmonella, which can be very dangerous. Rimming and scat (faeces) can also expose you to Hepatitis. If you want to lick someone's arse, you could try a dental dam (a square of latex) or you can make your own by carefully cutting up a flavoured condom. This can prevent

the transmission of infections. Both rimming and scat carry a risk of HIV if blood is present, although sometimes you may not be able to tell.

Watersports

Piss play for sexual pleasure doesn't carry any significant risk in terms of HIV or most other infections, but you should take care not to get shit or piss in any open cuts or sores. Drinking piss carries a higher level of risk as you may catch infections such as Hepatitis.

Fisting

This is inserting hands into the anus for sexual pleasure, so go gently! Your fingernails should be short and clean, the skin clean and unbroken. Rubber gloves can protect the skin and help prevent infection from HIV, hepatitis and other STI's. The risk of HIV transmission greatly increases if you fuck without condoms after fisting.

Different Types of HIV

Because the virus mutates, new types of HIV are always developing. Some of these are stronger than others. The danger is that you can become infected with new types of the virus by having unsafe sex with another positive man and these can attack the immune system in different ways that then overload it. Some types have already shown resistance to various combination therapies. Recent research in America and Europe has shown that between 10% and 25% of new HIV infection is resistant to some HIV treatments. Infection with drug resistant HIV can lead to your treatment options being severely reduced in the future,

which means that some drugs may not work very well or even at all. So even if you're having sex with another HIV+ man, there are reasons to keep using condoms. Practising safer sex is the only way to protect yourself against other STI's and new types of HIV. The main way in which HIV drug resistance develops depends on how well you take and monitor the treatments you are on. To make treatments most effective, the correct doses should be taken at the correct time and in the right way. Even missing the treatments a small percentage of the time can have a significant effect on resistance. It's also important that you monitor the effectiveness of your treatments by having regular appointments at your clinic, where the levels of HIV in your blood can be measured.

Remember, even if these results show very low, or undetectable amounts of the virus in your blood, fucking without condoms can pass on HIV. If you've given up using condoms, then this information about drug resistance might mean that you want to reconsider and start using condoms again so you can keep your treatment options open. However, if you have any worries about this issue, or any questions about drug resistant HIV, then it's advisable to see a doctor or health adviser at the GUM clinic as soon as possible.

Telling sex partners that you're HIV+

If you're HIV+, it's difficult to know whether or not to reveal your status to sexual partners. On the gay scene there's often discrimination from other gay and bisexual men, based on their own unfounded fears and prejudices. This stops some positive men from being open about their status, and it causes a lot of distress.

This is unfair and illogical, since other men who are assumed to

be negative can easily be positive or untested - but often nobody thinks twice about having sex with them. Positive men may feel there's a difference between revealing their status to sexual partners they know well, and telling men they have casual sex with. Many positive men worry that their partner (casual or long-term) will be angry or distressed, that they'll be rejected - which is difficult to cope with at the best of times. When it comes to telling your sex partners, there's no easy solution, and you may find that it's a skill you acquire over time by judging the reactions of different men. To come to terms with this, you may find it helpful to talk to a counsellor for advice and support.

HIV is a very personal subject. It's perfectly all right for you to wait until you feel that the circumstances are right before you tell someone. During this period, safer sex protects yourself and your partners, and safeguards against other sexually transmitted infections.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's)

Safer sex for HIV+ gay and bisexual men isn't just about HIV. It's also about protecting yourself from potentially dangerous illnesses you can get from having sex. Because of your damaged immune system they can have far more serious implications for you than they would for HIV- men. By practising safer sex you can seriously reduce your chances of getting one of these illnesses. For HIV+ men, STI's can be more difficult to get rid of. Another danger is that you could be exposed to other infections that speed up the rate of the disease and cause HIV to reproduce itself more quickly, increasing your chances of developing AIDS. Using antibiotics to treat STI's can also weaken some of the body's natural defence systems and may cause problems with other medication you might be taking. Repeated infection with STI's (such as syphilis and gonorrhoea) can damage your immune

system, again making you more susceptible to other infections. It's possible to have a STI without any symptoms. If you're sexually active, regular check-ups at your local GUM clinic are the best way to maintain your health and early treatment may help reduce problems later.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B can be picked up through: rimming, water sports, unprotected fucking and sucking. It's a serious illness that can lead to permanent liver damage. You can be vaccinated against Hepatitis B, and the vaccination doesn't harm you if you're HIV+, although for some positive men it may not work.

Advice, and the vaccination, which is free to gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with men, is available at most GUM clinics.

Contacting MESMAC North East

Newcastle Office

3rd floor, 11 Nelson
Street,
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 5AN
Tel: 0191 233 1333
Minicom: 0191 233 2112

Teesside Office

4th Floor, Prudential
House,
31-33 Albert Road,
Middlesbrough TS1 1PE
Tel: 01642 804400
Minicom: 01642 732 392

Email: all@mesmacnortheast.com
Website: www.mesmacnortheast.com

For more information about sexual health, GUM clinics, safer sex or other things you may be concerned about contact your local service:

NEWCASTLE

MESMAC North East: 0191 233 1333
(MESMAC NE work throughout the region)
(Minicom: 0191 233 2112)

GATESHEAD

STAG Project: 0191 490 1708

NORTHUMBERLAND

LGBT Worker: 01670 523 701

COUNTY DURHAM

GAD: 01325 355 551
Health Promotion (north): 0191 374 4131
Health Promotion (south): 01325 746 141

TEESSIDE

MESMAC North East: 01642 804 400
(Minicom: 01642 732 392)
Teesside Positive Action: 01642 254 598

SOME OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS:

GUM CLINICS

For consultation about your sexual health.

North Tyneside	0191 219 6610 0191 259 2519
Newcastle	0191 219 5013 0191 219 5011
South Tyneside	0191 451 6104 0191 451 6103
Sunderland	0191 569 9021 0191 569 9022
Northumberland	01670 814 873
Durham	0191 333 2660
Bishop Auckland	01388 455 700
Darlington	01325 743203
Middlesbrough	01642 854548
Stockton	01642 624400
Hartlepool	01429 522577

SEXUAL HEALTH HELPLINE

0800 567123 (open 24 hours)

All calls are free.



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NORTH EAST

For more information contact:

MESMAC North East

Newcastle

Phone 0191 233 1333

(24 Hour answerphone available)

Minicom 0191 233 2112

Fax 0191 233 1551

MESMAC text service:

TEXT: MESMAC (space) MEN (space)

Then your message to 60003

Email all@mesmacnortheast.com

Teesside

Phone 01642 804400

(24 Hour answerphone available)

Minicom 01642 732392

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