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Flaring up again

last prevalent on a large scale among gay men in the 1970s, syphilis is experiencing a revival. A new Terrence Higgins Trust campaign revisits an issue gay men thought had died out with Saturday Night Fever.

Campaign at a glance

- For workers – a briefing paper
- For gay men – ads and a booklet increasing syphilis knowledge and awareness
- Meeting knowledge needs around transmission and symptoms
- Making clear the more sexual partners, the greater the risk of syphilis
- Avoiding panic among those at little risk
- Sign posting sources of further information

The post-war peak in the incidence of syphilis among men came in the late 1970s. It had already started to fall before gay men adopted condom use in the early to mid 1980s, but this behaviour change produced a dramatic decline in syphilis infections. Although never eradicated, through the 1980s and most of the 1990s the infection was rare, with only a few dozen cases recorded annually resulting from sex between men. Its re-emergence after STIs were prioritised for health promotion work and several generations of gay men became sexually active unaware of the basic facts about syphilis.

Since 1998 homosexually-acquired syphilis infections have increased. Outbreaks have been reported in Manchester, Brighton and London, involving several hundred men in total so far. Men most likely to contract syphilis have been men with large numbers of sexual partners, especially those using saunas, cruising areas and sex clubs. Inconsistent condom use and also having HIV have also been commonly noted among men infected with syphilis.

A key factor driving the spread of syphilis has been men's inability to recognise their symptoms. In addition, many men believe fellatio to be a low risk activity for infection, such as syphilis, despite oral sex documented as an important syphilis transmission route. An awareness of syphilis symptoms and transmission routes, including heterosexual sex, has emerged as the major information need of gay men.

Initially, local gay men's health providers and health promotion units responded to outbreaks in Manchester, Brighton and London with information campaigns. Terrence Higgins Trust was contracted by the Department of Health to provide a national integrated syphilis awareness campaign.

- Such a campaign needed to:
- appeal to gay men (this to be gauged through pre-testing)
 - develop in consultation with other agencies combating syphilis in affected cities
 - avoid creating panic
 - contain elements aimed at both gay men and health promoters
 - meet information needs around symptoms and transmission (especially oral transmission)
 - be produced as quickly as possible

The campaign seeks to increase knowledge and awareness of syphilis among all gay men, without creating a rush for screening among men at negligible risk. The campaign aims to be especially relevant for those men identified as most at risk of syphilis, i.e. those having many partners in public sex venues in the main 'gay' cities.

A design route has been chosen that both appeals to men with many sex contacts and acknowledges that something from the past is returning. Pre-testing confirms the design's appeal to men at heightened risk (those with multiple partners and aged over 30).

The three ads carry text speaking to slightly different audiences, although common to all is the link between syphilis and partner numbers. As well as a 'general' ad, one addresses HIV positive men with multiple partners and advises screening. Another speaks to men with undiagnosed syphilis, referring to symptoms they may have ignored. Transmission and symptoms are covered over the three ads, with all mentioning screening, treatment and telephone helpline and web site referral details. Pre-testing, including with HIV positive men, helped refine copy and ensure acceptability to the intended audience.

The campaign elements comprise press ads, A4 posters and outreach tools (foldipops), while a four page briefing paper has been used at those working in GUM clinics, gay men's health projects, helplines and the gay press. A booklet has also been produced. This goes into more detail (including issues for HIV positive men) and was inserted into a September issue of *Boyz*, the most widely read free weekly publication for gay men. It is also being distributed independently in gay venues and by those doing direct contact work with men at risk.

Gay men saw the first press ads in early September. Ads will run for three months in a mix of national and regional gay publications. The ad speaking to men with HIV will appear in the HIV press but also mainstream gay papers.

Enquiries about the campaign, including requests for the syphilis briefing sheet, booklet and poster, should be directed to Richard Scholey tel: 020 7816 4644 email: richard.scholey@tht.org.uk

Locally Localised work around syphilis has been conducted across the summer. This has included activity from Manchester's Lesbian & Gay Foundation and the Brighton-based gay men's team at Terrence Higgins Trust South.

1 Findings from the 2000 Gay Men's Sex Survey found men with over 20 sexual partners in a year most likely to report getting syphilis in the previous year.

2 In Manchester, a quarter of cases went among men with HIV in London, a half, South, PHC.

Simon SAYS

Simon Nelson has recently joined the London-based Terrence Higgins Trust's gay men's team as Black Gay Men's Development Officer. Here Simon talks about his involvement with work with black gay men and where he hopes to take this in the future.



"Interestingly, things seem to have come full circle as my first experience of HIV-related work was at Terrence Higgins Trust way back in 1993. For three years I was a buddy volunteer with the organisation. My next step came in 1998 when I became a trainee employed within Camden Islington Health Promotion Service working with black gay men.

This position saw me setting up regular outreach sessions at black gay venues in London offering sexual health information and resources, such as condoms and lube. I also helped organise and co-host the Mr Black Gay UK 2000 event at the Sound Night club, Leicester Square. The event was used to gather information on black gay men's sexual health needs and a report on this is due in November.

The past two years have seen me penning a series of articles for the London gay weekly *QX* under the title *Chattblack* and these have been worked up into a sexual health booklet. Another resource for black men I had input into was the Camden Islington Health Promotion Service's *Switch the Groove* music CD. This was developed by black gay men and men who have sex with men themselves and covered issues like substance misuse, self-esteem and 'negotiated safety'.

Something for workers in the field that had my involvement has been good practice guidelines for work with black gay and bisexual men. This working document sits within the CHAPS strategy *Making it count* and is designed to help people wanting to start or expand work with this population of men. Its launch is expected later this year. Another milestone for me was introducing the issue of homosexuality in African communities at the Camden Islington-hosted African Men's Seminar held last year in London. In fact, one of my first tasks at THT will be to set up a Black Gay Men's Forum later this year to bring together agencies and professionals working with black gay men to discuss future work on a national basis.

Now that I'm in post I want to offer training to other agencies who want to develop work with black gay and bisexual men and do this using good practice guidelines. I'll be able to provide information and training to health professionals working in clinical settings around issues to do with black gay and bisexual men. Something else I'll be able to do is offer advice to researchers wanting to reach black men, using my insight into their different social networks.

Work I'm interested in doing among the black community includes raising awareness and acceptance of black gay issues within the community. I'd like to actively promote THT Direct (the new telephone advice line) through the black press and through direct work with black men across London and beyond.

I want people to see me as a resource they can call upon to enhance their work. I'd very much welcome any feedback or requests for advice around working with black gay men."

Simon can be reached by email on simon.nelson@tht.org.uk or by phone on 020 7831 0330.

Syphilis is

making a comeback, especially among men who have sex in saunas, cruising areas or backrooms. It's mostly spread by sucking and fucking, but everyone gets symptoms but it often starts with a rash, which is sometimes followed by a rash. These go but you're still infected. Ignored, syphilis is serious – treated early, it's curable. You can get a syphilis blood test at any Sexual Health Clinic.

LOOK WHAT'S BACK!



LOOK WHAT'S BACK!

Syphilis is

making a comeback, especially among men who have sex in saunas, cruising areas or backrooms. Could you have it? Maybe you've had a sore or a rash you've ignored. Or maybe you're one of the people who get syphilis but don't have any symptoms. Syphilis is serious – treated early, it's curable. A blood test is all it takes to check for syphilis. If you think you might have it, why wait any longer?



Syphilis is

making a comeback, especially if you've got HIV and have sex in saunas, cruising areas or backrooms. Ignored, syphilis is serious – treated early, it's curable. If you've got HIV, it might be a good idea to have a syphilis test if you haven't had one in the last six months.

LOOK WHAT'S BACK!



The cover of *Exposed 2* (above) and the three campaign adverts (right).



Single copies of the *Exposed 2* magazine are available free to men by sending the magazine request form to: **Exposed 2**, PO Box 1000, London W1A 0AA. For more information, visit www.exposed2.co.uk. The magazine is published by **Exposed 2** Publications, PO Box 1000, London W1A 0AA.

FAB ABS
No exercise required
6-pack cream

Mr PYTHON
Dick-lengthening spray
Boosts the size of your manhood

INSTANT HAIR GROWTH GEL
Banishes baldness
in under an hour

FAB ABS
No exercise required
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Campaign at a glance

- 7 out of 10 gay men expect a man with HIV
- to say so before sex
- Campaign target group: HIV negative or undecided gay men
- Campaign aims to lower numbers of men expecting disclosure from men
- And gives reasons why disclosure might not happen
- Pre-tested with groups of HIV positive and HIV negative men

Exposed! 2

After consulting with professionals within the gay press, CHAPS and extensive pre-testing, a marketing campaign was carried out by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and included the magazine *Exposed 2* for those men who are not ready to 'graduate' from their men's sex. The campaign was designed to challenge men to reassess their expectations by exposing them to how late of disclosure can be negotiated by HIV positive and HIV negative men. The magazine also contains a range of other articles, including a feature on the 'gay press' and the main print resource. The campaign is supported by other print resources, including a range of posters, leaflets and other materials. The campaign will be available to all agencies, whether within or outside of the CHAPS partnership.

Back-up resources on trial

CONFERENCE 2002

We're pleased to announce details of CS, the next CHAPS conference. The one and a half day conference, the fifth, takes place on February 14 and 15 2002. The venue is the School of Oriental & African Studies in Central London. Although we had hoped to stage the event outside the capital it proved impossible to find a venue to accommodate the expected increase in number of attendees. Following this year's superbly successful conference we have increased the numbers able to attend to the next in the series to 300. We'll be in a new building on the next conference to make the 2002 meeting an even more varied, relevant and diverse experience.

A call for papers has already gone out. Requests for copies and conference enquiries to **Richard Scholey** on 020 7816 4644 or by email at richard.scholey@thl.org.uk

Conference details will be posted on our web site: www.thl.org.uk/chapsconference5.htm

DIARY DATES

Making it count training

Free five-day-long training sessions around the Making it count strategy are underway. Sessions include interactive exercises, case studies and are aimed at those targeting gay men in the UK (mostly in London). It is for researchers, publicists or providers of voluntary and statutory services. Training will give you the knowledge of Making it count and its use as a planning tool. Dates so far confirmed are as follows:

- Leeds** Thursday 25 October
- Newcastle** Friday 26 October
- Birmingham** Monday 29 October
- Liverpool** Friday 2 November

Contact **Tom Doyle** of Yorkshire MEDMAC on 0113 244 4209 for more information, to book places or get details of additional sessions (dates of which are also posted at www.thl.org.uk/gaymen.htm)

National Strategy on Sexual Health and HIV - consultation with HIV

The draft of the National Strategy is now out for consultation. The Terrence Higgins Trust together with the UK Coalition of People Living with HIV is AIDS has been organising meetings across the country where people with HIV can go over the strategy and discuss their concerns. The last of these is scheduled as follows:

- London West** Wednesday 24th October
Lighthouse West London
119 Lancaster Road, London W11
Contact Arian on 020 7312 2906
- Leeds** Thursday 25th October
Queens Hotel, City Square
Contact Kristian or Jen on 0113 295 7520
- Brighton** Monday 29th October
Brighton Centre
Contact Perry on 01273 764200

All meetings take place 9am-5pm

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CHAPS COMMUNITY AND AIDS PREVENTION STRATEGY

CHAPS partners

- The Network of Self Help HIV in Aids Groups**
Tel: 020 7350 1545
- Birmingham**
Tel: 0121 654 8480
- Brighton**
Tel: 01273 764 200
- Bristol**
Tel: 0117 955 1000
- Cardiff**
Tel: 01792 477 182
- Leeds**
Tel: 0113 254 1747
- Leicester**
Tel: 01533 254 1747

London
Gay Men Fighting AIDS
Tel: 020 7728 1812
Healthy Gay Living Centre
Tel: 020 7407 3550

Manchester
Tel: 0161 235 8035

Research Partners:
Sigma Research
Tel: 020 7717 6223
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
Tel: 020 7617 2672

GAMPP Partners
Crescent in Brighton
Health Protection
Tel: 020 7530 2626
Gay Men Fighting AIDS
Tel: 020 7728 1812
Health Aid
Tel: 020 7955 4366
Healthy Gay Living Centre
Tel: 020 7407 3550
PACE
Tel: 020 7700 1122

Gay Men's Workers @ Terrence Higgins Trust
Tel: 020 7816 4642

Richard Scholey
Answers Officer
Tel: 020 7816 4644

W&L Devlin
Campaign Officer
Tel: 020 7816 4640

Sarah Nelson
Back Gay Men's Development Officer
Tel: 020 7816 0200

THC Midlands (Birmingham)
Tel: 021 684 6400

THC Midlands (Coventry)
Tel: 02476 229 202

THC Cyprus
Tel: 01292 477 540

THC Derbyshire
Tel: 01885 243 389

THC South (Brighton)
Tel: 01273 764 200

THC West
Tel: 0117 955 1000

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Incorporated in England

BEYOND BELIEF

A key finding from *Vital statistics*, the 1999 Gay Men's Sex Survey, came as a surprise to many; nearly 7 out of 10 men said they expected a man with HIV to tell them this before sex. A new CHAPS campaign aims to bring men's expectations more into line with reality.

High levels of expectation of disclosure illustrate that for many men a key aim of the CHAPS strategy Making it count is unmet; that is, men are aware of the possible HIV-related consequences of their sexual actions...

Men who do not always use a condom and expect HIV positive men to tell them, place themselves at risk on two fronts. Firstly, men diagnosed with HIV will frequently not disclose to them and, secondly, a large proportion of men with HIV cannot disclose their status accurately because they have not had their infection diagnosed. Men often overlook the fact that large numbers of infected men do not know they have HIV.

The 1999 Sex Survey showed that expecting men with HIV to reveal this varied across population groups. Expecting disclosure was:

- most common among men under 20 (8 out of 10 expecting to be told)
- least common among men diagnosed with HIV (one third expecting it)
- higher among men with less education
- lower the more sexual partners a man has

In addition:

- looking at men according to sexual behaviour, expecting disclosure is second highest among men reporting 'unknown UAF' (unprotected anal intercourse when one or both men do not know their HIV status)
- looking at testing history, men who are untested or tested HIV negative and who expect disclosure are more likely to not always use a condom

Footnote: 1 Data on expectations of disclosure taken from HIV statistics - findings from the National Gay Men's Sex Survey 1999, 2004, Sigma Research 2000.

