

HIV? AIDS? : we're older gay men it's not our problem ... / The Positive Place, Age Concern Lewisham.

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HIV? AIDS?

ROBERT TAYLOR



**We're older gay men
it's not a problem!**

**"Charlie died last year.
We never thought it
would happen to us."**

Frank, aged 68

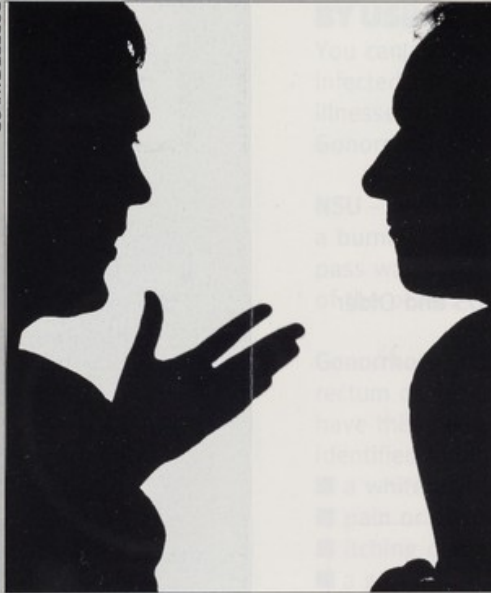


**AGE
Concern**
LEWISHAM

Whether you're in a long term relationship or not, if you're an older gay man who's sexually active you need to know about HIV and AIDS.

It may be that you sometimes have casual sex with someone in or near a "cottage" (public lavatory), in a park or on heathland. Some men who have sex with

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other men are married or live with a woman partner. It doesn't matter where or who with, you can be infected with the HIV virus from just one sexual contact.

The information in this leaflet will help you to enjoy sex

safely and protect yourself and any partner you have against the HIV virus.

WHAT IS THE HIV VIRUS ?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is a virus spread through the blood supply, weakening the body's resistance to infections and illnesses. If HIV is in your body, you are said to be HIV Positive.

WHAT IS AIDS ?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is a collection of specific illnesses and conditions that occur because the body's immune system has been damaged by the HIV virus.

HOW DO PEOPLE BECOME HIV POSITIVE ?

- sexual intercourse with an infected person
- injecting drug users sharing equipment

Sex

Penetration, without a condom, can lead to transmission of the HIV virus. During intercourse, infected semen or blood can pass from one person to another through the lining of the anus or through cuts and scratches on the penis, lining of the mouth, gums or on the tongue.

Injecting Drug use

Re-using needles or syringes can lead to the exchange of small quantities of blood. If one user is HIV positive, the infected blood can be passed on to another user.

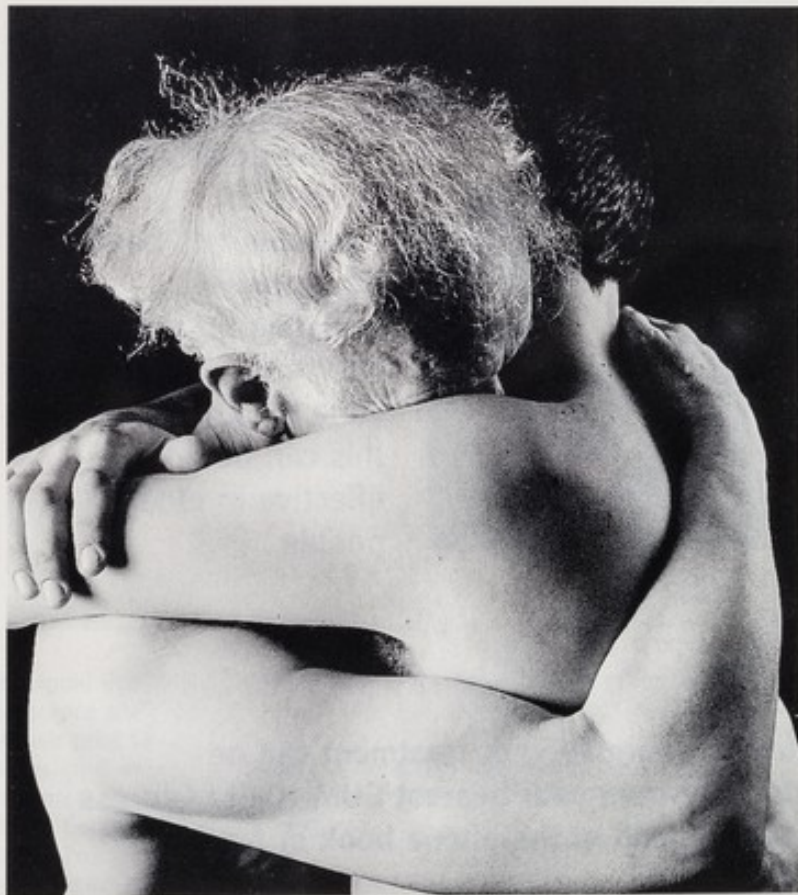
HIV IS NOT PASSED ON BY

- kissing, touching or hugging someone who is HIV positive
- touching or sharing objects that have been used by a person with HIV
- sneezing or coughing
- tears or sweat
- insect bites
- toilet seats

DOES BEING HIV POSITIVE MEAN YOU HAVE AIDS?

No. HIV is an unusual virus because a person can be infected with it for years and yet appear to be perfectly healthy. The virus gradually multiplies inside the body and eventually destroys its ability to fight off illness. However, it seems likely that many people with HIV will go on to have serious health problems, though this may not be for many years. People who contract HIV are infected for life and can pass the virus on to others.

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HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOURSELF?

- recognise that no matter what age or sex you or your partner are, HIV and AIDS concerns you
- take some simple precautions

WHEN HAVING SEX

Always use a condom (French Letter, Durex or Rubber Johnnie) for anal sex. After putting the condom on your penis always apply a water based lubricant like KY jelly.

Never use oil based lubricants such as creams, lotions, baby oil or vaseline, as they weaken and damage the rubber, causing the condom to break.

Condoms and lubricants can be bought across the counter in any chemist.

Using a condom does not mean penetration is completely safe – but it does make it much safer than unprotected sex.

If you have oral sex (sucking off), even if you don't come fully, it is still advisable to use a condom. Flavoured ones are now available for this purpose.

It is particularly important to remember these safeguards when you are relaxed – after a few drinks, away from home, on holiday or on business.

INJECTING DRUG USE

Always use your own equipment, mixing utensils and water. Never share with anybody, and dispose of used needles and syringes safely by putting them in a rigid container.

HOW CAN YOU FIND OUT IF YOU ARE HIV POSITIVE?

When people have become infected by HIV, the body produces antibodies to the virus. The HIV test looks for these antibodies. It's always a good idea to talk to someone about whether you need to take an HIV test. The telephone advice services listed on the back page will help you in making this decision.

Your doctor can give you the test – or you can go to a hospital VD clinic (now called a GUM clinic). If you want this to be kept private, go to a clinic, as you need not give your own name or address. You will also receive pre and post test counselling there.

WHAT DO THE RESULTS OF THIS TEST TELL YOU?

A negative test tells you that the antibodies to HIV have not been found. However, it can take three months or longer from the time of infection, for the antibodies to show up in the blood test. It is a

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good idea to have a further test after six months.

A positive test means that antibodies to HIV have been found and infection is present.

A positive test does not necessarily indicate that you have AIDS.

However, it does mean you can pass on the

virus to other people even though you may look and feel perfectly well.

If you or your partner is HIV positive, you certainly don't need to give up sex. Just remember always to use a condom.

Alternatively you can have very good sex without penetration – kissing, cuddling and massage are perfectly safe, and there are no risks of HIV infection from mutual masturbation.

BY USING A CONDOM

You can also reduce the risk of becoming infected with other sexually transmitted illnesses such as Non-Specific Urethritis (NSU), Gonorrhoea and Hepatitis B.

NSU – Inflammation of the urethra. Identified by a burning or uncomfortable feeling when you pass water and a white cloudy fluid from the tip of the penis.

Gonorrhoea – Bacterial infection of the urethra, rectum or throat. You may not know that you have this infection. It can sometimes be identified by

- a white or yellow discharge from the penis
- pain or discharge when passing water
- itching or discharge from the anus
- a sore throat

Hepatitis B – A viral infection that attacks the liver. Many people have no symptoms at all.

- Some people experience mild flu-like symptoms
- Jaundice – urine turns dark, eyes and skin turn yellow

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This illness may require admission to hospital. A vaccine has been developed, available through GUM Clinics or from your GP although this can be less effective in older people.

Further information or treatment can be obtained from your nearest GUM clinic. Address can be found in the phone book or from your GP.

FURTHER INFORMATION

There are two very good national confidential telephone advice services

National AIDS Helpline

0800 567123 24 hour Freephone

Terrence Higgins Trust

52-54 Grays Inn Road London WC1X 8JU

071-242 1010 12noon to 10pm daily

A Crisis of Silence: a report on HIV, AIDS and Older People. ISBN 1 87-709 144.

Copies of this report can be obtained from:

Age Concern Greater London

54 Knatchbull Road London SE5 9QY

Tel: 071-737 3456

LOCAL INFORMATION

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