

Reducing the risks : a leaflet for people who use drugs / Terrence Higgins Trust.

Contributors

Terrence Higgins Trust

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
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Reducing the risks

A LEAFLET FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS



The Terrence Higgins Trust



A Registered Charity to Inform, Advise and Help on AIDS and HIV Infection

Reducing the risks

This leaflet is about some of the links between HIV, health, using drugs and having sex. It is for you whether you are untested, HIV-negative or HIV-positive. **HIV** is transmitted through blood and sexual fluids. You can get it from fucking (penetrative sex) without a condom and sharing injecting equipment with someone who has HIV. *HIV is also transmitted from a woman to her child during pregnancy, child birth or breast feeding – for information refer to Helplist on the back page.* To reduce the chance of infection for you, read on.

HIV is a virus which attacks the human immune system, the body's defence against disease. In time, a person with HIV may develop opportunistic infections, symptomatic illnesses. This is known as being HIV symptomatic. **AIDS** is a syndrome which describes a range of diseases and prolonged illnesses related to HIV.

HIV cannot be passed on through social contact eg kissing, hugging, toilet seats, sneezing, sharing cutlery.



Looking after your health

Drug use can affect your general health in many ways. When combined with a poor diet and lack of sleep your body is less able to fight off infection. There are simple things you can do to minimise harm and maintain relative well being. This is particularly important if you have HIV or Hepatitis.

Try to eat regular and balanced meals. Drinking plenty of fluids (e.g. water, herbal teas and juices) and eating fresh fruit, vegetables and fibre (wholemeal bread, pasta, beans, cereal and unprocessed rice and sugar) will help reduce constipation (an effect of opiate use) and help clear away accumulated toxins in the body. It is important to replenish vitamins and minerals if you are using ecstasy, speed or cocaine.

Sleep is a basic requirement for good health in mind and body. If you have difficulties sleeping try some natural (eg camomile tea), herbal or homeopathic remedies (available from chemists), acupuncture and relaxation exercises. Sleeping tablets, such as benzodiazepines (temazepam, valium, etc) may help in the short term but not the long term and you can become dependent. Withdrawal from these drugs is unpleasant. If you are dependent on benzodiazepines do not stop suddenly as you could have a fit. Speak to your GP or a drugs worker for advice.

Drug use, particularly speed, can damage your teeth; methadone and other drugs dry up saliva (which cleanses the mouth) and makes you more likely to get tooth decay. Rinse your mouth out with water after drinking methadone. Get six monthly dental check ups – this will be free if you are in receipt of benefits.

Talk with your GP if you have any health concerns such as if you develop infections and inflammations where you inject. You may need a course of antibiotics.

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by drinking too much, bacterial infection (Hep A and Hep E) or viral infection (Hep B, D and Hep C). The ones that most commonly effect drug users are Hepatitis B (Hep B, HBV) and Hepatitis C (Hep C, HCV). If you have Hepatitis you should have your liver function and size monitored (by blood tests and palpation) and try to avoid alcohol and stimulants. Hep B is also transmitted through sex, blood and other bodily fluids. Hep C is blood borne and is not likely be transmitted through sex, unless blood is present.

These viruses are much more infectious than HIV and can survive heat, cold and drying out. If you want to find out more, ring one of the Helplines listed in the Helplist.

You can get regular sexual health check ups including smear tests, STD (sexually transmitted disease) and Hepatitis tests at your local GUM clinic. This is a completely confidential service and is usually the best place for an HIV test if you want one.

Looking after your emotional well being is important too. If you're feeling 'down' or depressed it might help to talk to somebody. You can get advice from a Drugs or HIV worker or you can contact one of the Helplines listed.

If you are HIV-positive it is a good idea to get regular health checks. Unfortunately some drug users and HIV-positive people have found it difficult to get a doctor who is sympathetic to their needs. For help in finding a (suitable) GP, contact your local drug agency or one of the listed Helplines. Alternatively contact your local FHSA (Family Health Service Authority) – they are obliged to provide you with a GP. It's a good idea to register with a doctor before you really need one.

Safer injecting drug use

HIV and other blood borne diseases (such as Hep B & C) can be transmitted by using infected works. Works are not just the needle and syringe but include spoons, mixing dishes, filters, water, citric acid. Ideally, use a new needle and syringe each time you inject and don't share any injecting paraphernalia.

Front loading & back loading – sharing a hit by injecting from one syringe into another – also carries risks because traces of blood can be left behind when previously used by another person.

TOP TIPS ON SAFER INJECTING

- › Bacteria can grow in 'dirty' (used) works so if you re-use them, you can give yourself a 'dirty hit', eg an infection, abscess or blood poisoning
- › Preparing a hit with fresh lemon juice can cause fungal infections and damage your eyes. Use citric acid or vitamin C powder instead
- › Use a filter – one from a cigarette will do. Don't use cotton wool because the fibres can damage your blood system.
- › Clean the injection site with a steret (swab) or soap and water to prevent infection
- › Change injecting sites regularly and use small needles to reduce damage and inflammation
- › Try not to inject when you're on your own because of the risks of overdose or dirty hits
- › Keep your own set of works
- › Don't share with anyone, not even your partner or best friend

Cleaning works correctly
may kill HIV but not
Hep B & C. This really
should be a last resort but if
you've no option clean in
the following way:

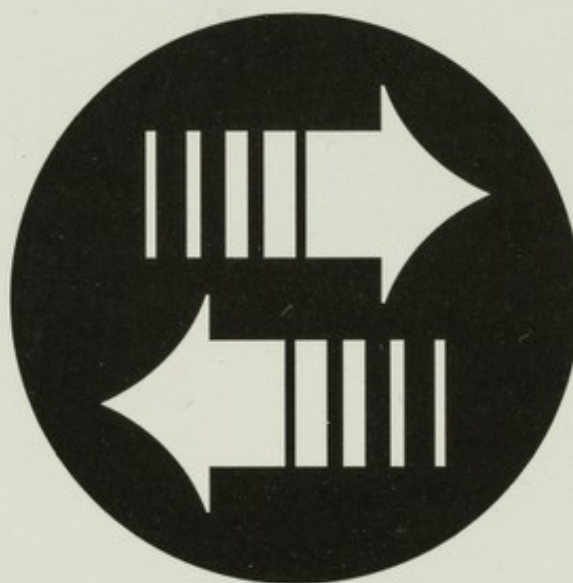
CLEANING WORKS

- › Draw fresh cold water through the needle into the syringe and flush X 3
- › Draw household bleach through the needle into the syringe and flush X 3
- › Draw fresh cold water through the needle into the syringe and flush X 3

Remember, do not flush out into the clean water

You can get works and packs free from Pharmacy and Needle Exchanges, as well as most drug agencies. Look out for this sign ›

You can also buy needles and syringes from chemists.



Washing up liquid is better than nothing and can be used if bleach is not available (watch out for the bubbles). This will not kill Hep B and C.

Hot water is not recommended as heat makes blood congeal so that traces of blood may be left in the needle and syringe. Disposable works usually buckle if boiled so this is not really an option.

Get rid of your used works carefully: needle exchange schemes provide sharps or 'cin' bins for safe disposal. If you do not have one, put the needle and syringe into a tin can, crush carefully to ensure they do not fall out, then place in a bin.

Alternatives to injecting include snorting, chasing, smoking, swallowing and do not carry any risks of HIV infection. You might want to consider getting prescribing treatment (eg methadone).

Helplist

For further information on drug use and HIV & AIDS you can contact any of the numbers below. This includes referrals to local drugs and AIDS services, complementary therapies, needle exchanges, HIV testing centres, etc.

THE TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST

52-54 Grays Inn Road, London
WC1X 8JU

Tel: 0171-831 0330

The Terrence Higgins Trust offers a wide range of services which are open to everyone. They are free of charge and strictly confidential. For people with HIV specialist advice & representation on welfare rights, housing & legal matters is available from the Advice Centre; practical help is offered by our Helper Cell Project & befriending by our Buddy Service.

For anyone with issues related to HIV, we offer professional counselling; Family Therapy is also provided. Referral to specialist drug services can be made.

The Library is open to the public by appointment. We run an information service & targeted health promotion projects

THT Helpline: 0171-242 1010

Noon-10pm daily

Support, information & referrals, for everyone concerned about HIV

THT Legal Line: 0171-405 2381

7-9pm Mon & Weds

Legal advice & information on HIV-related issues

Advice Centre: 0171-831 0330

10am-5pm Mon-Fri



The Terrence Higgins Trust



A Registered Charity to Inform, Advise and Help on AIDS and HIV Infection

52-54 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8JU

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RELEASE

Advice Line: 0171-729 9904

10am-6pm Mon-Fri

Helpline: 0171-603 8654

24 hours every day

Advice & information on legal & drug related problems – nationwide

PRISONERS' RESOURCE SERVICE

PO Box 3689, London NW1 8QP

Tel: 0171-267 4446

A confidential service for prisoners with drug-related problems, including HIV & Hepatitis in South East England

MAINLINERS

Tel: 0171-737 7472

Helpline: 0171-737 3141

9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri

Support & services for people concerned about or affected by HIV & AIDS and drug use

THE NETWORK OF SELF HELP HIV AND AIDS GROUPS

Tel: 01582-484 887

Information about your local self help group

THE BRITISH LIVER TRUST

Information line: 01473-276 328

2-5.30pm Mon-Fri

This line is staffed by trained medical personnel who can offer advice on Hepatitis

THE SAMARITANS

Tel: 0171-734 2800

(Central London)

Nationwide: 0345 90 90 90

(calls charged at local rate)

24 hours telephone emergency service for anyone who is feeling desperate, lonely or suicidal.

RAPE CRISIS CENTRE

Helpline: 0171-837 1600

6-10pm weekdays

10am-10pm weekends

NATIONAL DRUGS HELPLINE

Tel: 0800 77 66 00

NATIONAL AIDS HELPLINE

Tel: 0800 567 123

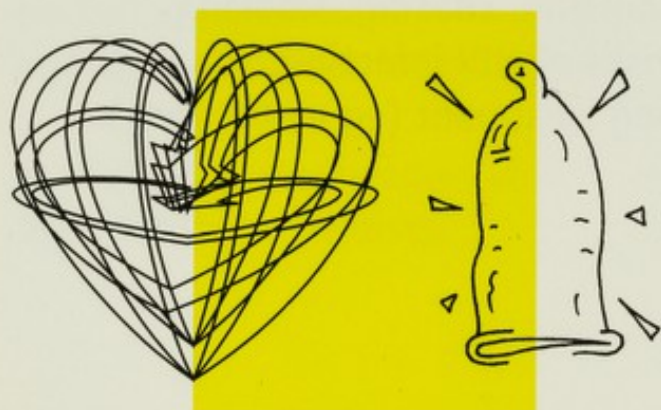
Both National Helplines are free, confidential and operate 24 hours everyday. Different language services are available – contact main number for details

Drugs and sex

Drugs can affect behaviour in lots of different ways and that includes sex. For example stimulant drugs such as cocaine, speed and ecstasy can prolong fucking, as can poppers (amyl nitrate). This may put strain on ordinary strength condoms and they could burst, so it is advisable to use a strong condom with plenty of water-based lubricant (lube). Prolonged sex can also increase the likelihood of getting thrush, cystitis and swollen genitals, anus and mouth. This might make it easier for you to get other infections including HIV.

Alcohol can lower inhibitions making it easier to discuss and practise safer sex but it can also encourage risky behaviour like fucking without a condom. Be prepared. Try getting into the habit of having condoms and lubricant to hand.

You can only get HIV, Hepatitis and other STDs from someone who already has the infection. However just because you've known someone a while doesn't mean you can tell whether they've got HIV or Hepatitis. You still need to continue with safer sex and drug using practices.



Safer sex

Safer sex is a way of minimising the risk of giving or getting HIV infection, whether you're having sex with men, women or both. It includes fingering, licking, wanking, body rubbing, fantasy games, kissing, fucking (vaginal and anal) with a femidom or condom with water-based lubricant (eg KY jelly).

The correct use of condoms or femidoms with plenty of water-based lubricant significantly reduces the risk of getting HIV, Hepatitis B and other STDs as well as preventing pregnancy. It is important to use condoms properly, so they don't burst or leak.

Lubricants can make fucking more enjoyable as well as safer, especially if you're having prolonged sex. Always use water-based lubricant with condoms. Because they are made of latex, oily lubricants (like baby oil) can rot the latex and the condom may burst. The Femidom is made of plastic so it can be used with most lubricants including oil-based ones. A drop of lubricant in the tip of the condom may improve sensitivity and increase sensation for the man.

Spermicide can offer additional protection as it has been shown to kill HIV as well as other STDs and sperm. Many condoms are spermicidally lubricated and some people find that the spermicide nonoxynol 9 causes irritation. If you are sensitive to this, use a condom with non-spermicidal lubricants, such as sensitol or other non-allergic brands.

Diaphragms and spermicide are an effective way of avoiding STDs and unwanted pregnancy and may help to protect from HIV. Women whose partners won't use condoms may want to try this as a last resort.

There are different types, sizes and flavours of condoms available. Novelty condoms are not reliable.

If you're fucking with more than one person, use a new condom or femidom with each person.

There is no risk of HIV if you use sex toys such as vibrators and dildos on your own. If you share toys that go inside the body, wash them well between use or cover it with a fresh condom.

ORAL SEX is safer sex because saliva and stomach juices contain enzymes which help to kill the virus. Although there is very little risk of passing on HIV, STDs can be transmitted especially if you have a poor dental state, infections, cracked lips, mouth ulcers and gum disease (gingivitis). Some people use flavoured condoms to protect against Hep B and other STDs, especially when having sex frequently with different people, for instance to get drugs, money, or a bed for the night.

Fellatio ('blow jobs', cock sucking): carries a small risk if he comes in your mouth and you have cuts or sores in your mouth or a throat infection. There are only a few cases world-wide where people have been infected with HIV in this way.

Cunnilingus ('going down on' or licking a woman): there are no reported cases of HIV being transmitted in this way.

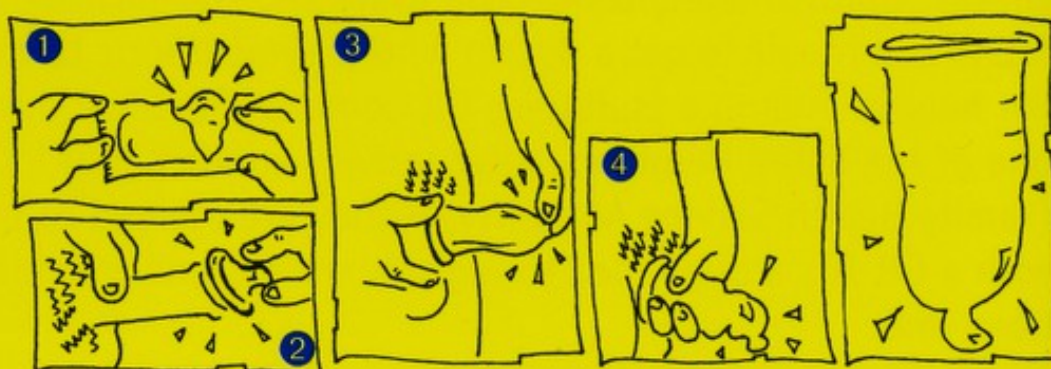
Rimming (licking the arse): this is not risky for HIV but may be for bacterial infections which can be particularly dangerous for people with damaged immune systems, including HIV.

TOP TIPS ON CONDOM USE

- › Always use a brand that has a Kitemark or new European CE mark
- › Check the expiry date and don't use it if the date has past.
- › Store in a cool place. Heat will perish the rubber and make it more liable to break
- › Use strong condoms for anal sex with lots of water-based lubricant.
- › Be careful not to tear the condom when opening the packet, unrolling and during sex with nails, teeth or jewellery ❶.
- › Make sure the condom is on the right way up so you can roll it.
- › Pinch the tip (teat) of the condom between thumb and forefinger to remove any air ❷ before gently unrolling down to the base of the penis ❸. This prevents bursting.
- › Always use plenty of water-based lubricant to make sex more comfortable and stop the condom from bursting.
- › While you're fucking, check now and again to make sure the condom is still intact
- › After 'cumming' withdraw the penis before it gets soft. Hold the condom carefully when pulling out to avoid spilling any semen ❹.

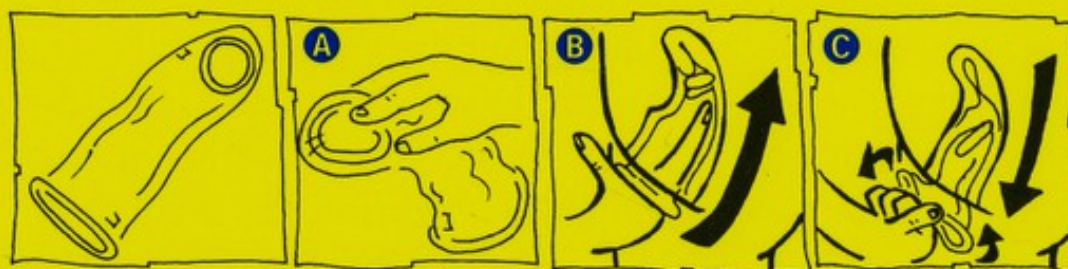


THE MALE CONDOM



- Dispose of your condoms carefully. Wrap them in tissue paper and throw in the bin.
- Never wear more than one condom at any one time – friction causes splitting.
- Never re-use a condom.

You should put on a condom before any penetration. It is not enough to wear one just for ejaculation, or to pull out before cumming.



THE FEMIDOM: **A** Grip the inner ring prior to insertion **B** Insert femidom into vagina until flexible inner ring meets pubic bone. **C** Twist outer rim for removal

HIV and Hepatitis testing

Consider the issues carefully before taking a test for HIV or Hepatitis. Ensure that you get pre and post test counselling and that you are feeling supported. It is advisable to speak with a Drugs or HIV worker first.

HIV and Hepatitis tests are available through your local GUM clinic (Special Clinic), Same Day Testing Clinic, and some drug services offer on-site testing. These services are confidential and you do not have to give your real name. See The Terrence Higgins Trust 'Testing' leaflet for more information.

Be aware that if you speak to a doctor about testing outside a GUM clinic and they record it, they are obliged to breach your confidentiality in terms of releasing information to mortgage and insurance brokers.