

Women and AIDS : plain speaking about AIDS and how it affects women, written for women by the experts - women. 1, Prevention / Positively Women and Immunity.

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Publication/Creation

1989.

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/pz4f8kx9>

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POSITIVELY WOMEN

A N D

immunity

Women

A N D

AIDS

*Plain speaking
about AIDS and
how it affects
women, written for
women by the
experts – women*

ISSN 0956-4713

1. Prevention

Updated
SECOND EDITION

All about condoms

There's a female condom that's being tested at the moment. It should be available in late 1989. You can get more information from the Margaret Pyke Centre. See the listings for how to contact the centre – until the condom's available the surest way of protecting yourself is by insisting the man you're going to have sex with wears a condom. Remember other forms of contraception, such as the diaphragm (cap), the coil or the pill DO NOT protect you from getting infected with HIV.

When you buy condoms make sure it's a brand that's labelled as being strong. We advise you pick a brand that contains nonoxinol 9, which has killed HIV cells in laboratory tests. Some condoms have the British Standards kite mark on the packet to show they're made to that standard.

- Check the expiry date on the packet.
- If the packet's already torn, throw away the condom. Exposure to the air can rot them and make them rip inside you. Don't take chances.
- Make sure the man's got the condom on properly. To be absolutely sure put it on him yourself.
- As well as a condom, always make sure you use a spermicide which contains nonoxinol 9 and use plenty of it. Check the ingredients on the packet before you buy, or ask the pharmacist. Never use a petroleum jelly – like Vaseline – or any oil-based products because they rot condoms.
- The contraceptive sponge also contains nonoxinol 9. To be trebly sure, use all three: condom, spermicide and sponge together. You'll find them together on the chemist's counter.

Survival guide

AVOID THE RISKS

- Vaginal or anal penetrative sex without using a condom correctly in conjunction with a spermicide containing nonoxinol 9 is very risky. Make sure the condom isn't past the expiry date on the wrapper and remember never to use petroleum jelly, like Vaseline, with condoms, it rots them. Remember, you only need to have unprotected sex with an infected man once to get infected.
- Oral sex may be risky if you've got cuts or sores on your mouth, gums or tongue.
- Enemas and douches can scratch and cut you inside. So if you use them before or after sex, you increase your risk of getting infected.
- There are many ways to enjoy sex without penetration. Try penis to body contact – but not between your buttocks or your thighs. Penis to breast contact is safe and is fun. Talking dirty, exploring fantasies and mutual masturbation are other safe alternatives to penetrative sex. Many men are worried about AIDS too. So make safer sex fun for them, too.

GOOD CLINIC GUIDE

Any NHS special clinic should offer advice and counselling and a test if you ask for one. Many hospitals have special clinics. You'll find them listed under the hospital's name in the phone book or under "Special Clinics" in the community pages at the front of the Thomson Directory.

DRUGS

The only certain way of not getting infected with the virus if you inject drugs is to always use your own works. We all know using drugs makes your lifestyle chaotic and in real life we don't always have a new set of works to use each time. If that's the case follow these guidelines if you can:

- Clean your syringe and needle with either bleach or washing-up liquid. Then rinse them with plenty of hot – or better still, boiling – water.
- Always use your own spoon. Some people have been infected by blood left on the spoon.
- Always use your own filter. These, too, can have infected blood in them.
- If you're splitting your fix with someone, don't transfer it from one syringe to another – unless both syringes and needles are new. One of the syringes or needles may already be infected and you'll be running a risk, even if the spoon's clean

LESBIANS

Lesbians are generally described as a very 'low risk' group – but should still take care and:

- never share sex toys – vibrators, for example.
- always wash sex toys after use.
- do not have oral sex during a menstrual period.
- make sure any open cuts, sores or grazes on hands and/or fingers are covered.
- be aware of the danger of breaking the skin which exist in sexual practises like fisting – or other activities which could cause bleeding, however slight.
- **remember** some lesbian women are IV drug users. Some have slept with men – and some still do.

TAKING THE TEST

Whenever you catch an infection – a cold or 'flu, for example – your body produces antibodies to that infection as part of your getting better. Your body produces antibodies to HIV, but they can't kill this virus, because it has moved into your blood cells.

There's a test available which shows whether you've got antibodies to HIV in your blood. It's this test which a lot of people call 'the AIDS test'.

There's another test – called the antigen test – which shows whether the virus in your blood is active or not. There's no test which can show whether someone who's already infected with HIV will go on to develop AIDS.

If you're thinking of having an HIV antibody test, you can have one free at any NHS genitourinary medicine clinic. They're often called 'special', 'GU' or 'STD' clinics.

Think twice before you have a test. The implications of a positive result can be devastating. If you decide to go ahead and have a test make sure you get counselling beforehand as that will make a positive result easier to handle.

Remember that, until a cure's been discovered, all you can do if you get a positive result is switch to a healthy lifestyle. We advise everyone to do this anyway.

General advice

You can get general information and advice on AIDS and HIV from the National AIDS Helplines on 0800-567 123 (24 hours a day). Your call is free. Or, if you have a positive result, contact Positively Women on 01-837 9705 (10am-5.30, weekdays).

For other, more specialised, advice and help see the listings panel on this leaflet.

AIDS and racism

Racism against black women is one of the side effects of AIDS – because early research showed that blood samples taken in the Congo in the late 1960s were infected with HIV. The researchers who claimed to have found the virus in those blood samples have since admitted that their original results were unreliable.

In fact, there is no evidence that AIDS originated in Africa. There are people living with HIV infection in every country in the world. Unfortunately, many women in minority communities – just like many women in majority communities – think HIV infection and AIDS does not affect them. Because their communities may frown on some of the higher risk sexual activities, many black women, like all women, think they are not at risk.

The truth is that any woman or woman's partner who is having high risk sex outside the relationship is at risk of becoming infected with HIV. That means all women must inform themselves about self protection from HIV infection.

GROUPS AND SERVICES

Afro Caribbean Helpline Service: Black advisers offering specialised service and support on National AIDS Helpline, 0800 567 123 *Fr 6pm-10pm. Calls free*

AIDS and Housing Project: Write: 16-18 Strutton Ground, London SW1P 2HP

Body Positive: Mutual help and support group. Drop-in centre at 51b Philbeach Gardens, London SW5. Legal and welfare benefits advice sessions by Immunity's Legal Centre. Helpline: 01-373 9124 *Daily 7pm-10pm. Write: PO Box 493, London W14 0TF*

Childline: Confidential counselling for children and young adults in trouble or danger. Write: Freepost 1111, London EC4B 4BB - no stamp needed. Phone: 0800 1111 - calls free. *24 hrs*

CLASH (Central London Action on Street Health): Young people's advice and support on anything to do with health. Write: c/o Soho Hospital, Soho Square, London W1. Phone: 01-734 1794 *Mo-Fr, 10am-5pm. Other times answering machine*

Dentists who treat people who have HIV infection: NHS Special Needs Dental Clinic, Alderney Street, London SW1. Phone: 01-630 8436 *Mo, 3pm-5pm; Tu, We, 9am-noon or: advice on who to see from Mrs Satchell at City and Hackney Health Authority. Phone: 01-253 3020*

Frontliners: Mutual help and support group for people who have AIDS. Write: c/o Terrence Higgins Trust, BM AIDS, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-831 0330

Haemophilia Society: Information, advice and support for everyone who has haemophilia - and special representation of and support for people with haemophilia and infected with HIV by using Factor 8. Write: 123 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1. Phone 01-928 2020

Immunity: HIV research and health education charity with UK's only full-time specialist legal centre for anyone with a legal or benefits problem connected with HIV infection, AIDS or an associated condition. Free legal advice and court representation on offer. Also welfare rights advice. Phone to fix an appointment. Charity and legal centre at 260A Kilburn Lane, London W10 4BA. Phone 01-968 8909. *Mo-Fr 10am-5pm*

The Landmark: Day centre for people who have HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Will offer advice, recreational facilities, meals. Legal and welfare benefits advice sessions by Immunity's Legal Centre. Plus info for other people. 47 Tulse Hill, London SW2. Phone: 01-671 7611/2

Lesbian Employment Rights: Non-AIDS specialist. Good on rights at work. Write: Room 203 Southbank House, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ. Phone: 01-587 1636 *Mo-Th 7pm-10pm*

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: The original helpline. Not an AIDS specialist but helpful. Write: BM Switchboard, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-837 7324. *24hrs*

London Lesbian Line: Information, support and advice for women. Phone: 01-251 6911 *Mo, Fr 2pm-10pm; Tu, Th 7pm-10pm*

London Lighthouse: Hospice and drop-in centre. Offers counselling, health advice, support at home, breaks for carers and terminal care. Legal and welfare benefits advice sessions by Immunity's Legal Centre. Write: 111-117 Lancaster Road, London W11 1QT. Phone: 01-792 1200

Margaret Pyke Centre: Gynaecology centre. Also does research. Free clinic. Gives free contraceptives - including condoms. Ring for appointment before visiting. 15 Batemans Buildings, Soho Square, London W1. 01-734 9351

Mildmay Mission: Christian-run hospice for people who have AIDS. Write: Hackney Road, London E2 7NA. Phone: 01-739 2331

National AIDS Helplines: Phone - free of charge - 0800 555 777 (for free leaflets) or 0800 567 123 (for confidential advice). *24 hours a day*

Nurses Support Group: Runs helpline for health care workers who need advice and help on HIV problems. 01-708 5605. *Mo, We, 7pm-10pm*

Positively Healthy: Self-help group encourages positive approach to coping with HIV infection and AIDS. Runs life-affirming support groups and open meetings for people with HIV antibodies or AIDS. Publishes monthly magazine (send 34p SAE). Write: PO Box 71, Richmond TW9 3DJ. Phone: 01-940 5355

Positively Women: UK's sole women-only support group - meetings open only to women with positive diagnosis - and counselling (face-to-face and on the phone), advice and information. Write: 333 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PX. Phone: 01-837 9705 *Mo-Fr 10am-5pm. Support group meets fortnightly, Th 6.30pm-8.30pm*

Positive Partners: Self-help support for anyone affected by HIV. Write: c/o 10 Rathbone Place, London W1. Phone: 01-249 6068

Prad Street Project: Research project also offers free, STD and general women's health medical and information service for prostitutes. Contact: c/o Prad Street Clinic, St Marys Hospital, London W2 1NY. Phone: 01-725 1549/6486 *Mo-Fr, 9am-5pm. Open afternoon We 7pm-5pm. Visits by appointment Tu, 10am-5pm, We, 7pm-5pm*

Rape Crisis Centre: Physical protection and emotional support. Write: PO Box 69, London WC1. Phone: 01-837 1600. *24hrs*

SCODA (Standing Conference on Drug Abuse): Information officer keeps up-to-date list of needle exchange schemes. Write: 1-4 Hatton Place, London EC1. Phone: 01-430 2341/3

Terrence Higgins Trust: Information and counselling about HIV infection and AIDS plus support groups and trained volunteers to help people with HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Write: BM AIDS, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-831 0330 (Admin only) Helpline: 01-242 1010 *Daily, 3pm-10pm*

Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre: Not an AIDS specialist - helpful. Advice on all health issues affecting women, including HIV infection and AIDS. Write: 52-54 Featherstone Street, London WC1. Phone: 01-351 6332 *Mo, We, Fr 11am-5pm*

POSITIVELY WOMEN

Is an organisation run by women for women with HIV infection, AIDS - or any of the conditions associated with it. We offer the following services: support group, open only to women who have HIV infection, AIDS, or an associated condition, telephone and one-to-one counselling and consultancy services. Write to us at 333 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8PX or phone us on 01-837 9705

WHAT'S AIDS?

AIDS is short for the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. If you have AIDS your body's defence system is severely weakened. That leaves the body vulnerable to serious infections, which can kill you. That condition is called AIDS. It develops in you.

SO WHAT'S HIV?

HIV stands for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. The virus was discovered in 1983. Since then it's been called LAV and HTLV-III, but since 1986 its official name has been HIV. It may cause AIDS to develop in you. To get infected you have to let someone's body fluids – blood, semen, vaginal fluids and, possibly, breast milk – get into your blood stream. There are no known cases of infection through tears and saliva. HIV isn't like most viruses because, when you're infected it lives inside blood cells which are part of your body's defence system. As the cells divide and multiply, so does the virus. Many scientists assume that anyone with HIV infection is at risk of developing AIDS

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

It is very difficult to get infected with HIV. You can put yourself of risk of getting infected:

- By having sex with someone who has HIV infection. You can cut the risk of infection by making sure he wears a condom – and remember, the more partners you have penetrative sex with, the greater you risk of coming into contact with the virus. Anal penetration is far riskier than vaginal penetrative sex.
- By sharing needles or syringes with someone who's infected with the virus.
- By sharing sex toys, whether you're straight or lesbian.

The virus can't be transmitted by social contact – by kissing, cuddling, shaking hands, sharing cups, towels, using toilets or by any close contact that doesn't involve the exchange of body fluids.

immunity

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ISSN 0956-4713