

**Plain speaking about HIV and AIDS and how it affects women written for women by the experts - women. 1, Prevention / Positively Women.**

**Contributors**

Positively Women (Organization)

**Publication/Creation**

[1992?]

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/apfaky8h>

**License and attribution**

Conditions of use: it is possible this item is protected by copyright and/or related rights. You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s).



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

# POSITIVELY WOMEN

Plain speaking about HIV and AIDS  
and how it affects women written for  
women by the experts – women.



## PREVENTION

## **Survival guide – avoid the risks**

### **Safer sex**

All women who are sexually active need to be aware of the risks involved and whenever possible it is important for women to take responsibility for their health by insisting on safer sex. It is important to remember that:

- **vaginal or anal penetrative sex without using a condom correctly is very risky. Remember, you only need to have unprotected sex with an infected man once to get infected yourself.**
- **oral sex is risky during a menstrual period or if the active partner has cuts or sores in their mouth, bleeding gums, ulcers, etc.**
- **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.**
- **sharing sex toys, without cleaning them between partners, is risky.**
- **it is important for women who are HIV+ to practice safer sex even with a positive partner, because reinfection may further damage your immune system.**

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 fun. Talking dirty, exploring fantasies, mutual masturbation, massage and showering together are other alternatives to penetrative sex. In fact, all sexual activities that do not involve the exchange of body fluids so use your imagination – many men are worried about AIDS too, so make safer sex fun for them.

### **All about condoms**

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 – condoms which show the British Standard kite mark have been tested for strength and reliability. You may be advised to pick a brand that contains nonoxynol 9, which has killed HIV cells in laboratory tests. However, current research from Canada suggests nonoxynol 9 may cause genital inflammation in approximately 50% of people who use it and may therefore facilitate infection. So, until we know more, it's a matter of personal choice.

To help make condoms safer:

- Check the expiry date on the packet.
- Use a new one every time; never re-use condoms.
- 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.
- Never use oil based lubricants, such as Vaseline or baby oil, as they weaken and can destroy the condom. Use a water based lubricant, such as KY.
- Some women are allergic to rubber. If this is the case for you, try using special hypo-allergenic condoms available in chemists or at your clinic.

Free condoms and spermicides are available at Family Planning Clinics and Genito-Urinary Medicine clinics or can be bought at chemists or supermarkets. Condoms are also available from vending machines in public toilets.

#### **Dental dams**

Dental dams are used by some people during oral sex (especially during menstruation). Placed over the vagina they act as a barrier much in the same way as condoms and provide extra protection against infection.

They can be obtained from Cottrell & Company, 15-17 Charlotte Street, London W1P 2AA. Telephone 071 580 5500.

#### **Lesbians**

The attitude that lesbians are not directly involved with the AIDS issue or that they are not at risk is still widely spread. This is not true. Lesbians can get HIV/AIDS too. Care should be taken and we recommend that you:

- 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 exists 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.

### Drugs

The only certain way of not getting infected with the virus if you inject drugs is always use your own works. We all know using drugs can often make 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:

- **Flush out the barrel and needle with undiluted thin domestic bleach (twice), then flush out well with COLD 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 is clean.**

### 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 is commonly called 'the AIDS test'.

There's another test, 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 Genito-Urinary Medicine clinic. They're often called 'Special', 'GUM' 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. If you have a positive result and would like to speak to other women in the same situation call Positively Women on 071 490 5515.

Remember, until a cure has 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.

### **Good clinic guide**

Any NHS special clinic should offer advice, 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.

### **General Advice**

You can get general information and advice on AIDS and HIV from the National AIDS Helpline on 0800 567 123 (24 hours a day). Your call is free. Or, if you have a positive result, contact Positively Women on 071 490 5515 (10am-4.30pm weekdays).

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

### **AIDS and racism**

Racism against black women is one of the side effects of AIDS as 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 these blood samples have since admitted that their original results were unreliable.

In fact the origin of AIDS is unknown and there is no evidence whatsoever that AIDS originated in Africa. However, there is still widespread discrimination resulting from the myth that it did.

The important thing to remember is that there are people living with HIV infection in every country in the world and that every woman who is sexually active needs to be aware of the risks involved. ALL WOMEN should inform themselves about self protection from HIV infection and whenever possible it is important for women to take responsibility for their health by insisting on safer sex.

### **What is HIV?**

HIV stands for 'Human Immunodeficiency Virus'. This is the virus believed to cause AIDS.

A positive HIV antibody test means that at some time you have had contact with the virus and your body has produced antibodies in response to the infection. It is these antibodies that have been found in your body if you have a positive result. Antibodies are produced by the body to help fight infection. The HIV antibodies, however, do not kill the virus.

### **So what is AIDS?**

AIDS stands for 'Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome'. If you have AIDS your body's defence system is severely weakened which leaves the body vulnerable to serious infections, which can kill you.

Some people have HIV infection for years, without developing AIDS. Some develop illnesses less serious than AIDS. There is no way of knowing from your antibody test when, or if, you will develop AIDS.

### **How does it spread?**

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

- **By having unprotected penetrative sex, vaginal or anal, with someone who has HIV infection.**
- **By sharing needles or syringes with someone who's infected with the virus.**
- **From mother to baby – during pregnancy and childbirth.**
- **From blood transfusions. In Britain blood is screened but this is not always the case abroad.**
- **By using semen from a man who is HIV+ for donor insemination. In Britain screening is done in all insemination clinics so the risk lies in making personal arrangements if using semen from a donor who has not been tested.**

**The virus can't be spread 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.**

### **Groups and services**

**Black HIV and AIDS Network:** Phone 081 693 6000.

**Blackliners:** PO Box 74, London SW12 9JY. Helpline: 071 738 5274.

**Body Positive:** For addresses and phone numbers of BP groups phone the National AIDS Helpline (0800 567 123) or contact Body Positive, Helpline: 071 373 9124 daily, 7-10pm.

**British Pregnancy Advisory Service:** Write: 7 Belgrave Road, London SW1. Phone: 071 222 0985.

**CLASH (Central Action on Street Health):** Young people's advice and support on anything to do with health. Write: 15 Bateman Buildings, Soho Square, London W1. Phone 071 734 1794. Mo-Fr 10am-5pm. Other times, answering machine.

**Frontliners:** Mutual help and support group for people who have AIDS. Phone: 071 430 1199.

**Haemophilia Society:** Phone: 071 928 2020.

**Mainliners:** An organisation in the drugs and HIV field that promotes self help and provides services. PO Box 125, London SW9 8EF. Phone: 071 274 4000 ext 443.

**Margaret Pyke Centre:** Family Planning Centre. Also does research. Free clinic. Gives free contraceptives - including condoms. Ring for appointment before visiting. 15 Bateman Buildings, Soho Square, London W1. Phone: 071 734 9351.

**National AIDS Helpline:** Phone: - free of charge - for confidential advice: 0800 567 123 24 hours.

### **Positively Women**

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 groups, 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 5 Sebastian Street, London EC1V 0HE or phone us on 071 490 5515 (client services) 071 490 5501 (administration).

**Positively Women:** Advice and support for and from women who have HIV infection, AIDS or a condition connected with HIV infection and AIDS. Write: 5 Sebastian Street, London EC1V 0HE. Telephone: 071 490 5515 (client services); 071 490 5501 (administration).

**Positive Partners:** Self-help support for anyone affected by HIV. Write: c/o 10 Rathbone Place, London W1P 1DE. Phone: 071 249 6068.

**Rape Crisis Centre:** Physical protection and emotional support. Write: PO Box 69, London WC1. Phone: 071 837 1600 24 hours.

**Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA):** Information officer keeps up-to-date list of syringe exchanges and drug projects. Write: 1-4 Hatton Place, London EC1N 8ND. Phone: 071 430 2341.

**Terrence Higgins Trust:** Information about and counselling over HIV infection and AIDS. Plus support groups and trained volunteers to help people who have HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Write: 52-54 Grays Inn Road, London WC1N 8JU. Phone: 071 831 0330 (admin only). Helpline: 071 242 1010 daily 3-10pm.

**Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre:** Not an AIDS specialist - but helpful. Advice on all health issues affecting women, including HIV infection and AIDS. Write: 52 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8RT. Mo, We, Fr 11am-5pm. Phone: 071 251 6580/6332.

Positively Women produces other leaflets in the series 'Women and AIDS', the titles of which are:

1. **Prevention**
2. **Positive Result? - Look after yourself**
3. **HIV, Pregnancy and Children**
4. **Women, Drugs and HIV**
5. **African Women's Health Issues**

Copies of these leaflets can be obtained from Positively Women, 5 Sebastian Street, London EC1V 0HE. Telephone 071 490 5501.