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POSITIVELY WOMEN

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



PREVENTION

All women who are sexually active need to be aware of the risks involved in certain sexual activities. Whenever possible it is important for women to take care of their health by insisting on safer sex.

Vaginal sex

Vaginal penetrative sex (intercourse) without using a condom correctly is very risky. Remember you only need to have unprotected sex with an infected man once to risk becoming infected yourself. You may not be infected the first time but this doesn't mean you never will.

Anal sex

Some women enjoy anal sex. It is important that if you are having anal sex that you not only use extra strong/safe condoms but that you also use plenty of lubricating gel. The bottom is generally very tight and small tears can occur easily, causing bleeding. The tightness also puts a lot of pressure on the condom. This is lessened by lubrication.

All about condoms

The surest way of protecting yourself, if you want to have intercourse, 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 that they are the right kind for the activity you are planning. Flavoured condoms are really only safe for oral sex (mouth to penis). Only extra strong/safe should be used for anal sex. Condoms which show the British Standard kite mark have been tested for strength and

reliability; they don't however state what type of sexual activity they are most appropriate for. Many condoms contain nonoxynol 9 which helps in killing the HIV virus. However many women find it causes irritation in the vagina, increasing the possibility of the virus entering your system.

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. Lubricants reduce friction against the condom reducing the risk of it tearing. 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.**
- **Femidoms are now available in most chemist and clinics, with advice on how to use them. The method used for testing their safety is not yet confirmed. They should never be used with a condom as they contain an oil based lubricant.**

Touching

Massage, stroking and rubbing your bodies together carries no risk of HIV infection.

There are many ways to enjoy sex without penetration. Try penis to body contact, but not between your buttocks or thighs. Penis to breast contact is safe and fun.

Talking dirty, exploring fantasies, mutual masturbation; massage and showering together are all alternatives to penetrative sex. In fact, all sexual activities that do not involve the exchange of body fluids are safe. So use your imagination; you might have more fun.

Make sure any open cuts, sores or grazes on hands and/or fingers are covered when fingering.

Many men are worried about HIV too, so make safer sex fun for them too.

Sex toys

Sharing sex toys (dildos, vibrators etc) without cleaning them between partners can be risky.

Putting a condom over a vibrator avoids the interruption of cleaning. Having your own instrument is another alternative.

Oral sex with a woman

Oral sex (mouth to vagina) is risky to the active partner if they have sores or cuts in or around their mouth, particularly during a menstrual period.

Dental dams are used by some people during oral sex. Placed over the vagina or anus 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 OR Fiesta, Chiltern St, London W1.

Oral sex with a man

There are similar risks in mouth to penis sex as there are with mouth to vagina sex.

Although stomach acids are known to kill the HIV virus it can enter the body through cuts or sores in the mouth.

Condoms are a good protection, and come in different flavours for this purpose.

Drugs

The only 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 fresh COLD water.**
- **If you can't get hold of any bleach, flush out with clean, cold water as often as you can.**
- **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.**

Groups and services

Black HIV and AIDS Network:

Write: 111 Devonport Road,
London W12 8PB.
Phone: 081 749 2828;
Helpline: 081 742 9223.

Blackliners:

Write: Unit 46,
Eurolink Business Centre,
49 Effra Road,
London SW2 1BZ.
Phone: 071 738 7468;
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
office: 071 835 1045;
Helpline: 071 373 9124 daily, 7-10pm.

British Pregnancy Advisory Service:

Write: 7 Belgrave Road,
London SW1.
Phone: 071 222 0985.

CLASH (Central London Action on Street Health):

Young people's advice and support on
sexual health and safer drug use.
Write: 15 Bateman Buildings,
Soho Square,
London W1V 5TW.
Phone: 071 734 1794.
Mo-Fr 10am-5pm.
Other times, answering machine.

Haemophilia Society:

Phone: 071 928 2020.

Mainliners:

An organisation in the drugs and HIV
field that promotes self help and
provides services.
Write: 205 Stockwell Road,
London SW9 9SL.
Phone: 071 738 4656
(client services)
or 071 737 3141 (advice).

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

Positively Women: Advice and support
for and from women who have HIV
infection or AIDS.

Write: 5 Sebastian Street,
London EC1V 0HE.
Phone: 071 490 5515
(client services);
071 490 2327
(Helpline 12am-2pm Mo-Fri);
071 490 5501 (administration).

Positive Partners:

Self-help support for anyone
affected by HIV.

Write: The Annexe,
Jan Rebane Centre,
12-14 Thornton Street,
London SW9 0BL.
Phone: 071 738 7333.

Positive Women Scotland:

c/o Scottish AIDS Monitor,
26 Anderson Place,
Edinburgh EH6 5NP.
Scottish AIDS monitor also provides a
full range of advice information and
support services.

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
(12 noon-10pm).

The Women's Group, Manchester:

c/o George House Trust,
PO Box M60 1PU.
Telephone: 061 839 4340.
Support group for HIV positive women in
the North West of England.

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, Th, Fr 11am-5pm.
Phone: 071 251 6580/6332.

AIDS and racism

The origins of HIV/AIDS are 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.

Good clinic guide

Any NHS clinic should offer advice, counselling and a test if you ask for one. Many hospitals have special clinics that are completely confidential/and or anonymous. 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. If you are considering going to your GP for an HIV test you should be aware that even making an enquiry at your GP's about an HIV test could mean that it goes on your medical record which could prevent you from getting a mortgage or life insurance.

General advice

You can get general information and advice on HIV and AIDS 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 (10.00am -4.00pm Weekdays) or the Helpline on 071 490 2327 (12.00am- 2.00pm weekdays) For other specialist advice and help, see the listing panel on the back of this leaflet.

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 is a test available, the HIV antibody test, which shows whether you've got antibodies in your blood. It's this test which is commonly called the 'AIDS test'.

There is 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 are often called 'Special' 'GUM' or 'STD' clinics.

Think twice before having 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 as you, call Positively Women on 071 490 5515 OR on our helpline 071 490 2327 (12.00am-2.00pm weekdays).

What is HIV?

HIV stands for 'Human Immunodeficiency Virus'. This is the virus that causes AIDS.

A positive HIV antibody test means that at some time you have had contact with HIV and your body has produced antibodies to the virus. 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, leaving the body vulnerable to infections which can have serious consequences to your health.

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 is infected with the virus.**
- **From mother to baby – during pregnancy and childbirth. The virus is only passed on to between 13%-30% of babies whose mother is HIV positive. Breast feeding increases the risk of transmission.**
- **From blood transfusions. In Britain blood is screened, but this is not always the case in other countries.**

- **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.

Positively Women

An organisation run by women for women with HIV and AIDS. We offer the following services: support groups, open only to women who have HIV and AIDS, 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 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.