

Lesbians, HIV & AIDS : lesbians & safer sex... are you serious? : HIV & AIDS: the facts / written & researched by Tracey Nathan and Louise Knowles ; produced by Sheffield AIDS Education Project.

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LESBIANS, HIV & AIDS.



LESBIANS & SAFER SEX...
ARE YOU SERIOUS?

PUTTING OURSELVES IN THE PICTURE

Many lesbians have felt that information given out in relation to AIDS and HIV has ignored their needs. Silence about lesbians and HIV has created a lot of fear, misinformation and anger. Although sex between women is very low risk we have still been affected by HIV - we have suffered increased homophobia ; we are often close to people with HIV and are involved in working around the issues. We need clear information in order to assess any risks we may be taking and to decide whether we should take safer sex seriously .

This leaflet isn't about telling anyone what to do , it simply starts to give the information we need in order for us to make the choices that feel best for us as lesbians.

The information given here is only concerned with sexual practices between women , which are , on the whole , low risk . It is important to remember though that if you are sharing needles and syringes or having unprotected sexual intercourse with men for any reason , you could be at risk of HIV.

IT'S NOT WHO YOU ARE IT'S WHAT YOU DO.

**FOR TOO LONG, WE AS LESBIANS HAVE
INFORMATION AROUND SEXUAL HEALTH
POSITIONS**

BEEN SILENCED ABOUT OUR SEXUAL PRACTICES. ONLY WHEN WE HAVE SUCH INFORMATIVE CHOICES AND TAKING CONTROL.

LET'S GET SERIOUS.

The risks for sexual transmission of HIV between women are minimal. Very few women have passed the virus to other women sexually.

ORAL SEX is considered a minimal risk. Only a few people (both men and women) have become infected with HIV in this way. If a woman has open cuts or sores in her mouth there may be a risk. If the woman receiving oral sex is menstruating or bleeding from her genitals in any way there may also be a risk.

If you want to be completely sure that you are not taking a risk during oral sex you can use a '**DENTAL DAM**' to cover the genital area. These are small squares of latex (cling film can also be used) which prevent any vaginal fluids or menstrual blood from reaching your mouth.

Sharing **SEX TOYS** could be a risky activity. If they are covered with traces of blood or vaginal fluids, when inserted into a partner's vagina or anus they could pass HIV on, or any other sexually transmitted diseases. Any sexual activity which can lead to bleeding or cause breaks and cuts in the lining of the vagina or anus (eg. **FISTING**) can create a low risk situation if infected blood or vaginal fluids enter these cuts.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION (AID) is risky because semen is one of the most effective fluids for transmitting HIV. If you decide to inseminate you should know the detailed medical history and possible risk activities of each potential donor, including drug use and sexual behaviour. If you want to be completely sure of your donor's HIV status, he has the option of taking an HIV test.

LESBIANS, HIV & AIDS.

HIV & AIDS : THE FACTS...

AIDS IS CAUSED BY THE VIRUS HIV (HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS)

THE VIRUS CAN BE PRESENT IN BLOOD, SEMEN AND VAGINAL FLUIDS OF AN INFECTED PERSON.

YOU ARE AT RISK OF INFECTION IF THESE FLUIDS GET INTO YOUR BLOODSTREAM.

HIV IS PRIMARILY PASSED ON THROUGH UNPROTECTED ANAL OR VAGINAL INTERCOURSE OR BY SHARING NEEDLES ('WORKS').

NOBODY KNOWS WHERE AIDS CAME FROM ALTHOUGH GAY MEN, DRUG USERS, PROSTITUTES AND AFRICANS HAVE BEEN USED AS SCAPEGOATS.

NOBODY HAS EVER GOT HIV FROM ORDINARY SOCIAL CONTACT.

PEOPLE WITH HIV OR AIDS DESERVE OUR RESPECT AND SUPPORT.

Hopefully this leaflet has shown that although lesbians run few risks of contracting HIV sexually from other women, we should not be excluded from issues around sexual health. Neither should we exclude ourselves. In general it is true to say that lesbians get fewer sexually transmitted diseases than heterosexual women, but we are not immune from them. For example, herpes and thrush are just as common for lesbians as for women who are sexual with men. If you are concerned that you maybe infected with any sexually transmitted disease you should go to the Genito-urinary clinic (GU) at the Hallamshire Hospital or to your GP.

LOCAL INFO:

SHEFFIELD AIDS LINE: Free, confidential advice about HIV/AIDS. 0800 844334 MON - Fri 7-10 p.m.

DEPT.G.U. MEDICINE: Info on HIV tests, services related to HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. 766928.

LESBIAN LINE: Confidential info about issues on sexuality. 581238 Thurs. 7 - 10 p.m.

YOUNG LESBIAN GROUP: Advice and info. about sexuality issues. 581238 Wednesdays 7.30-9.30 pm.

ROCKINGHAM DRUG PROJECT: For confidential advice about drug use and info about free needles and syringes. 580033

NATIONAL INFO:

NATIONAL AIDS LINE: 0800 567123 .24 hours a day and free.

POSITIVELY WOMEN: Support and info for women with HIV and AIDS. 071 837 9705. mon-fri 10am-4pm.