

Better Health for Gay Men

Sexual Identities

Not every man who has sex with another man is necessarily gay. Through our lives, most of us go through periods whether we experiment with and explore our sexual feelings and desires. Labels like gay and straight more often refer to what identity people feel they most belong with, not just who they have sex with.

Because your sexual identity encompasses so many things, it can sometimes take people a while to figure out which label (or labels) they are most comfortable using. Some people prefer not use any labels to describe themselves. There's no reason to rush into deciding on a label to describe your sexual identity. In the meantime phrases like 'unsure' or 'same-sex attracted' might be helpful to use.

Like all human beings, gay men engage in many different kinds of sexual activity. Individual gay men are all different. Some might have lots of sex, some might not. Some might enjoy many different types of sexual activities while others might just prefer a few. Some find that sex is a really important part of their lives while for others it might not be.

Here are some **golden rules** for good sexual health;

1. Get tested regularly

The more sex partners you have the more often you should get tested. At least yearly if you have any casual partners and 3-6 monthly if you have a lot. This reduces the chances of having an undiagnosed STI that can harm your own health as well as increase your risk of picking up or passing on HIV.

2. Recognise and act on symptoms

If it stings when you piss, if you find a sore on your dick or arse or if you get a rash or itch don't just hope it will go away - get it checked out.

3. Tell your recent sex partners

If you've been diagnosed with an STI, or even just think you have one, let your recent sex partners know so they can get checked. This reduces the number of STIs in the community and reduces your chances of getting it again.

4. Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B

There are vaccinations available for both hepatitis A and B which may be prescribed by a GP or possibly available for free from sexual health clinics.

5. Use condoms and water based lube

Condoms provide the most effective protection against the transmission of HIV and significantly reduce the risks of picking up a range of other STIs.

Condom Use Guidelines:

- Condoms come in different shapes and sizes (eg tighter fitting, regular, larger fitting, flared) - choose the best for you;
- Check the use by date and the Australian Standard mark;
- Take care not to tear the condom when opening the packet;
- If uncircumcised, pull back the foreskin;
- Squeeze the air out of the tip and roll the condom all the way down to the base of the dick;

- Use lots of lube;
- Check from time to time that the condom is still intact and apply more lube;
- When pulling out, hold the condom by the base so it doesn't slip off;
- Only use condoms once and, if having sex with multiple partners, use a new condom with each partner;
- Throw them in the bin not down the toilet.

Unprotected sex

Sometimes, a couple may have some form of unprotected sex. If this happens, suggestions for what you might do include:

If the broken skin of the HIV negative partner comes in contact with the ejaculate, blood, urine or faeces of their HIV positive partner, wash well with warm water and soap.

Seek advice from your doctor. Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is a month-long course of medications for people who have been exposed to the HIV virus. To be most effective, they should be commenced within 72 hours of exposure. It is best to take them as early as possible after exposure. These drugs can be toxic on the body with unpleasant side effects such as vomiting, nausea and lethargy. PEP is not an alternative to safe sex. If you think you have been exposed to HIV, or think you need help, visit www.getpep.info or call 1800 889 887. This is a 24-hour telephone service.

Talk about the factors that led to the unprotected sex and work out ways to avoid the same mistake in future.

Positives

HIV positive men with HIV negative partners can still enjoy physically intimate relationships.

Sexual activities that are considered safe include kissing, cuddling, stroking, massage, masturbation, mutual masturbation, oral sex (with no ejaculate in the mouth) and anal sex with a condom using water-based lubricant.