

## Lesbian Health Information

Adapted from material produced by the Queensland Association for Healthy Communities  
<http://www.qahc.org.au/lesbian>

AS LESBIANS WE NEED TO LOOK AFTER OUR HEALTH!

Lesbians are no different from heterosexual women in most aspects of their health but some things can be a bit different and we need to be aware of them to take good care of ourselves.

Firstly we may experience homophobia from other people and feel we need to hide our sexuality some of the time, or in particular situations. This might be necessary for our safety but it is often not good for our health. It is great to find someone supportive who you can talk to about being a lesbian, and important to be especially aware of how negative comments and experiences can make you feel down.

Lots of lesbians find good support and someone to “talk” to on the internet when they don’t have anyone they can trust with their secret in the real world.

The other way in which we can be different is that lesbians are less likely than heterosexual women to seek routine health care because they fear rejection or discrimination. This isn’t good as some things that are easy to treat at the beginning get worse over time. We need to find a health care provider we can trust and make sure we get regular check-ups even if it takes a bit of “shopping around”.

On the good side lesbians are less at risk of sexually transmissible infections (STI) than heterosexual women. However, some STIs can be passed on when two women have sex and some of us have sex with men which puts us at greater risk. Using condoms for sex with men, making sure you do not let vaginal fluid or menstrual blood into open cuts and sores, and having an STI check up as part of routine health care are all good strategies to stay healthy.

Lesbians need to have routine Pap tests. Even if you have never had sex with a man, you could still have Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which is sexually transmissible and can lead to cervical cancer. We also need to be breast aware and check our breasts regularly for changes or lumps, making sure we go to the doctor early if we find anything that worries us. Some of the factors that may contribute to breast cancer (such as smoking, obesity and alcohol use, for example) are more common amongst lesbians than heterosexual women so it is worth checking out.

Like everyone, lesbians need to be safe but they can often be the subject of harassment or violence. Learn to assess situations that might not be emotionally or physically safe and have a plan worked out in advance about where you can go and who you can look to for help.

Lesbians are great friends, excellent partners, terrific lovers, good family members and take care of each other; all these things are really good for your health.