

Safer & Healthier Sex

A photograph of a shirtless man from the chest up, holding a white sign. He is wearing blue jeans. The sign has the text '10 Tips for Gay Men' in bold blue letters.

**10
Tips for
Gay Men**

the | institute
FOR GAY MEN'S HEALTH

GMHC
GAY MEN'S HEALTH CENTER
APLA
AIDS PROJECT L.A. ANGELES

Safer & Healthier Sex

10 tips for gay men

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Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are Not a Thing of the Past

Since the early 1980s, HIV and AIDS have been the primary focus of sexual health education and information for gay and bisexual men, with good reason. Until the mid-1990s, few effective treatments for HIV were available and many people who were infected died. Today, new drugs are helping people live longer, but HIV infection remains incurable and potentially deadly.

This focus on HIV might make it seem that other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are less serious, or perhaps even a thing of the past. However, today, rates of some STIs like syphilis, gonorrhea, and human papilloma virus are increasing in our community. And while it's true that these and other STIs are easier to treat than HIV and may not cause any future serious problems if caught in time, they are serious infections that can have real consequences for your health. Further still, some STIs like hepatitis A and B, can lead to months of acute and debilitating sickness and lasting liver disease. Although most STIs are not as dangerous as HIV, it is important to know the risk factors for each and how to prevent, recognize and treat them. Keep this brochure as a reference. It will help you in those moments when you need information for maintaining a more pleasurable and healthy sex life. At the end of this brochure, you will find a list of resources and organizations to contact for more information, support, or health services.

1

The risk of acquiring an STI depends on what you do

As you'll see in the table on pages 6 and 7, some infections are transmitted even when you use a condom, simply by touching someone intimately (genital-to-genital, anal, or hand contact) or sharing intimate objects, such as sex toys. If you want to completely eliminate the possibility of acquiring an STI, you must avoid all sexual

contact. Sex is an integral part of our lives, and it is arguably unrealistic to think you would abstain completely from sex in order to avoid STIs. If you have sex with someone who does not have an STI, you'll be fine. Knowledge is key to making decisions about precautions you can take when you have sex.

2

Know about the HIV/ STI connection

If you are HIV negative, acquiring an STI increases your chances of also acquiring HIV. Infections such as herpes, gonorrhea and chlamydia weaken the immune system, inflame the mucous membranes, and raise the number of white blood cells in the infected area. As a result, there are more ways through which HIV can enter the body.

If you are HIV positive, skin lesions (sores or ulcers) due to an outbreak of herpes, chancroid, or syphilis, make it easier to transmit HIV.

The combination of HIV and other chronic STIs such as herpes and genital warts can lead to complicated and painful situations. Even scabies, which is easy to treat in people without HIV, can produce chronic, extensive and highly contagious skin lesions. Further, the presence of hepatitis C is associated with a faster progression toward AIDS.

Get vaccinated for hepatitis A and B

It is recommended that you be vaccinated for hepatitis A and B so that you may avoid life-long problems of the liver. Some people who are at high risk of infection in childhood, such as African-Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, should get tested for hepatitis B before vaccination. If you have had hepatitis A or B, you are very unlikely to contract it again. If you have not had them, ask your doctor or check with the organizations listed at the back of this brochure to find out where you can get vaccinated.



Table 1. Guide to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Infection	What is it?	How do I get it?
Chlamydia	Bacteria that can infect the urethra (the opening in your penis), throat, anus or testicles	Oral or anal sex without protection
Genital herpes	A virus that causes sores on sex organs or mouth	Skin to skin contact even when there are no symptoms
Genital warts	A virus that infects the sex organs and causes warts or bumps, some very small	Contact with warts
Gonorrhea	Bacteria that can infect the urethra (the opening in your penis), throat, anus or testicles	Oral or anal sex without protection
Hepatitis A	A virus that causes inflammation of the liver	Orally transmitted. Sharing silverware or toothbrushes, eating contaminated food, or oral-to-anal contact with an infected person
Hepatitis B	A virus that causes inflammation of the liver. May lead to cancer or cirrhosis	Contact with infected blood or bodily fluids, unprotected* anal sex or sharing needles with an infected person
Hepatitis C	A virus that causes a more serious inflammation of the liver and liver failure over time	Contact with infected blood or bodily fluids, unprotected* anal sex or sharing needles
HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)	A virus that attacks the immune system	Unprotected anal and vaginal sex, sharing needles
Lympho-granuloma venereum	A bacterial infection that can cause ulcers on the penis or anus	Anal or oral sex – unprotected anal intercourse is a common risk factor
Syphilis	A bacteria that causes a chancre sore on butt, penis, or mouth. Untreated, it spreads throughout body	Oral or anal sex without protection. Contact with sores.

5 *It is important to always use condoms properly. For persons whose sexual behaviors can reduce the risk of STI transmission. However, no protective method is 100%

How can I tell?**How do I
get rid of it?****How do I
lower my risk?**

After 7–14 days, there is a smelly discharge or burning, particularly when urinating, and itching or pain and swelling in the testicles.

Antibiotics

Pay attention to any odors. Use condoms for anal and vaginal sex.

After 5–21 days, there are small, painful sores that will go away. They may itch, burn, tingle or ooze. Sores reappear later.

NO cure. Treatments lessen symptoms and help prevent recurrence.

Pay attention to outbreaks and sores. Avoid contact as much as possible.

After many months, small, painless bumps appear on genitals or anal area. Some itch.

NO cure. Warts are removed through different methods.

Pay attention to warts around someone's penis/vagina, anus and genital area.

After 3–5 days, there is a smelly discharge or burning, particularly when urinating.

Antibiotics

Pay attention to any odors. Use condoms for anal and vaginal sex.

After 10–50 days, there is fever, abdominal pain, nausea and fatigue.

NO cure. May take 6–12 months to resolve and is rarely fatal.

Get vaccinated. Use a latex barrier for anal and vaginal contact.

After 60–90 days, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, yellowing of skin and eyes, dark urine.

NO cure. Liver infection can become chronic and sometimes be fatal.

Get vaccinated. Use a latex barrier for anal and vaginal contact.

After 60–90 days, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, but mostly no symptoms.

NO cure or vaccine. High chance of becoming chronic and fatal.

Don't share needles. Use a condom for anal and vaginal sex.

Get an HIV test. During the first weeks: flulike symptoms, fever, night sweats, weight loss, sore/swollen lymph nodes occur. After some years, people may develop illnesses, infections, and cancers (AIDS diagnosis).

NO vaccine or cure. HIV treatments help many people with HIV/AIDS to live longer and healthier lives.

Don't share needles. Use a condom for anal and vaginal sex.

Within 30 days, pimple or blister turns into ulcer. Painful lymph nodes, anal discharge, bloody diarrhea.

Three weeks of uninterrupted antibiotics

Use a condom for anal and vaginal sex. Pay attention to any open sores.

After 3 weeks, sores on genitals or mouth, rash, swollen glands, and fever.

Antibiotics

Use a condom for anal and vaginal sex. Pay attention to any open sores.

4

Take any symptoms on your penis or anus seriously

Pay sufficient attention to the symptoms of possible STIs, such as secretions or dripping from the penis or anus; pain; burning sensation or itching during urination or defecation; blisters (ulcers); red spots; sores; or outbreaks in the genital area. Don't make excuses for not seeing your doctor.

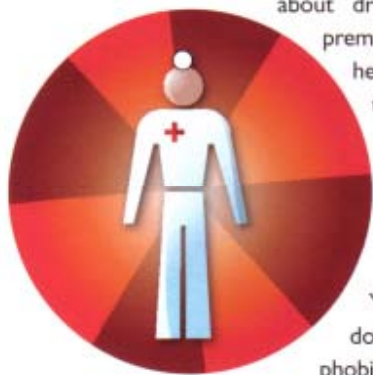
Pay attention to your penis when you shower or urinate. If you are not circumcised, pull back the foreskin to expose the head of the penis and look at the inside.

Generally we pay very little attention to the anus, but anal health is important to our overall sexual wellness. When you are in the shower, pass your fingers around the opening. Then insert your fingers carefully and feel around very slowly. If you notice something out of the ordinary, visit your primary care doctor or a nearby clinic and get tested immediately. STIs that are caught early are usually easier to treat and, in some cases, cure.



Talk to your doctor about your sex life

Your doctor needs information to be able to help you improve your sexual health. So talk to your doctor about your sex life. It isn't always easy to talk about such matters: we think it isn't important or we're embarrassed to tell the doctor that we are gay. However, your doctor will be able to advise you on vaccines, give you a checkup, and respond to your questions. Also, your doctor can help you address concerns you may have about drugs, erectile difficulties, premature ejaculation, or hemorrhoids and how these problems might be affecting your sex life.

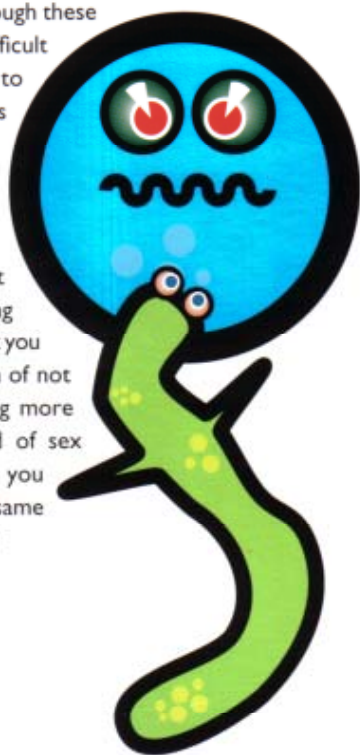


It isn't always easy to find a doctor who will respect you as a gay man. You may run into some doctors who are homophobic or aren't sensitive to gay patients' needs. If your doctor makes homophobic comments, disrespects you, or ignores your requests for a checkup, you should look for another doctor who is more sensitive to gay patients' needs. Call a gay community center or an HIV organization in your city so that they can recommend to you a doctor who will be sensitive to your needs. The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association is also a great resource: www.glma.org. There are additional resources on the back of this brochure.

6

Even if it's uncomfortable, you need to talk to your sex partner(s) about STIs

Communication with your sex partner(s) is an important step when trying to avoid the transmission of STIs. You may not have enough confidence to talk to him about that red spot on his penis. It is better to get over the embarrassment rather than infect him or become infected. Although these matters can be difficult or uncomfortable to talk about, many STIs require that both people get tested and treated to avoid re-infection. It can be difficult to talk about STIs if you are having sex with a stranger. But you always have the option of not having sex or of being more careful with the kind of sex you have. Wouldn't you want him to take the same precautions with you?



Condoms can help protect you from many, but not all, STIs

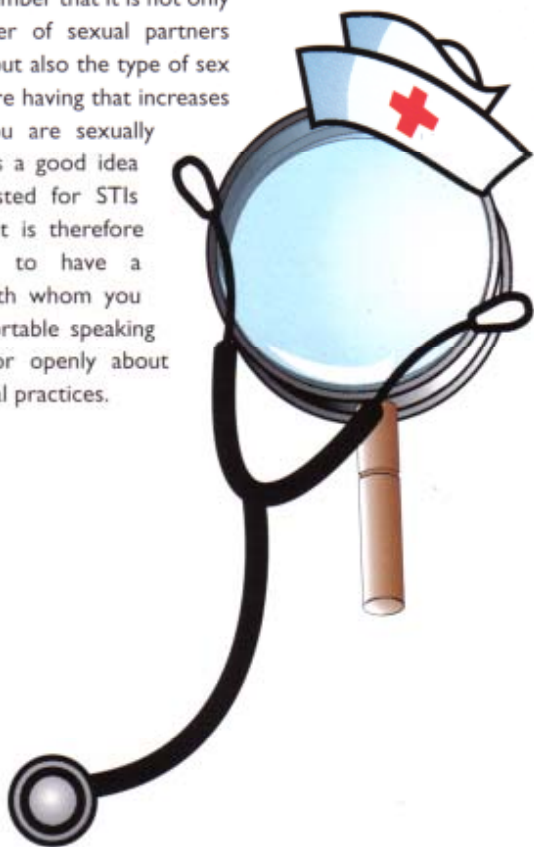
The modes of transmission for STIs are different. Some STIs are transmitted simply through contact with open sores or surfaces of the skin that a condom does not cover. However, for many STIs the best way to reduce the risk of infection is by using a condom.

Most of us know how and when to use condoms. However, many times the use of condoms depends on who we're with, the kind of sex we're having, and where we're having it. It's always best to plan ahead if you can. If you feel you need more information or you don't feel comfortable with your sexual decisions, talk to your doctor or call an organization for gay men or a health organization and ask for someone who can answer your questions.



Get checked regularly for STIs

Given that many people do not have symptoms, getting tested regularly for STIs is important. It can also help you make decisions that will reduce the risk of acquiring STIs again. If you are having sex with many people, the risk of acquiring an STI increases. Likewise, remember that it is not only the number of sexual partners you have but also the type of sex that you are having that increases risk. If you are sexually active, it is a good idea to get tested for STIs regularly. It is therefore important to have a doctor with whom you feel comfortable speaking honestly or openly about your sexual practices.



Understand the connection between party drugs, sex and STIs

You may be using or thinking of using drugs while having sex. People use drugs for many reasons. Some people use drugs to have fun, dance and loosen inhibitions. Others use them to escape their problems and to counter feelings of depression or anxiety. Some gay men experience strong peer pressure to use drugs before or during sex. Because some drugs may lower your inhibitions, you might end up having sex that goes beyond your sexual limits and could increase the risk of STI and/or HIV transmission. Below are a few commonly used drugs that can increase the risk of STI and HIV transmission:

Amphetamines (speed, crystal, ecstasy)

Gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB)

Ketamine (Special K)

Alcohol

Marijuana (pot, weed, stix, grass)

Amyl nitrates (poppers)

Viagra, Cialis, Levitra



Most drugs impair your judgment. You may find that you might have sex that you wouldn't normally allow yourself to have, including sex without condoms.

Some drugs may keep you feeling sexual for prolonged periods of time. As a result, you may have sex with multiple partners, thus increasing the risk of transmission of an STI, including HIV. In addition, having anal sex for extended periods can increase the potential for rectal damage or tearing, which can also increase the risk of STI transmission.

It is always wise to minimize or eliminate your use of drugs before or during sex. Mixing some drugs has been known to lead to serious injury and even death.

Some couples stop using condoms or forget to use them. If you are in a relationship and are considering having anal sex without condoms, you need to talk openly with your partner about it. Strong relationships are established on trust, honesty, open communication, and mutual protection. You and your partner should routinely talk about sex, STIs, open vs closed relationships, and condom use. You should also talk about what to do if one of you contracts an STI.



In many cases it won't be an easy conversation. But in the end, you will be more confident that you and your partner are making sexual decisions that are healthier for both of you. Talk to your doctor, talk to your friends, and most importantly, talk with your partner. Talk with him about going together to get tested for STIs and HIV and discuss the risks with your doctor before you decide to stop using condoms.



RESOURCE DIRECTORY

To find a doctor who is sensitive to gay men, try the **Gay and Lesbian Medical Association** (www.glma.org).

To receive information about confidential HIV/STI testing, try the resources below or on the back of the brochure.

The brochure back lists local resources for **New York City** and **Los Angeles**.

U.S. NATIONAL RESOURCES

1-866-344-KNOW (1-866-344-5669)

A 24-hour, toll-free hotline where you can get a free guide about HIV/AIDS and sexual health, be connected with the CDC's AIDS hotline for information about HIV testing in the U.S., or connect with a local Planned Parenthood clinic for other sexual health services.

1-800-458-5231

National Prevention Information Network

A national service for free educational materials about HIV, TB and other sexually transmitted diseases.

1-888-THE-GLNH (1-888-843-4564)

The Gay and Lesbian National Hotline

A non-profit organization which provides nationwide toll-free peer-counseling, information, and referrals.

1-800-676-HIPS (1-800-676-4477)

HIPS Hotline

Harm-reduction-oriented health information for sex workers.

1-800-347-TEEN (1-800-347-8336)

National Gay & Lesbian Youth Hotline

1-800-227-8922

National Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) Hotline

Provides anonymous, confidential information on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and how to prevent them. Also, provides referrals to clinical and other services.

NEW YORK CITY RESOURCES

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
www.callen-lorde.org
1-212-271-7200

GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS
www.gmhc.org
1-800-AIDS-NYC (1-800-243-7692) / 212-807-6655

Gay Men of African Descent (GMAD)
www.gmad.org
212-828-1697

Anonymous HIV Testing provided by NYC Dept. of Health

The Hetrick-Martin Institute
www.hmi.org
212-674-2400

Hispanic AIDS Forum, Inc. (HAF)
www.hafnyc.org
212-563-4500

Latino Commission on AIDS
www.latinoaids.org
212-675-3288

People of Color in Crisis (POCC)
www.pocc.org
718-857-5900

LOS ANGELES RESOURCES

AIDS PROJECT LOS ANGELES
www.apla.org
213-201-1600

AltaMed Health Services Corp.
Men's HIV Prevention/Education Program
www.altamed.org
323-307-0100

Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team
www.apaitonline.org
213-553-1830

Bienestar Human Services, Inc.
La Casa Gay and Lesbian Center
www.bienestar.org
323-727-7897

Common Ground
www.commongroundwestside.org
1-888-554-5459 / 310-314-5480

Confidential HIV Testing by the Los Angeles Dept. of Health
<http://www.lapublichealth.org/std/clinics.htm>
1-800-758-0880

L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center
www.laglc.org
323-993-7500

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