

English

What Men Should Know

Welcome to afya4men.info, a resource on male sexual health.

Here you will find information on a variety of topics important to keep men (and especially men who have sex with men) healthy.

HIV: Transmission And Treatment

HIV: Transmission And Treatment - Men And Sex

What Men Should Know

We are sexual beings and enjoying a satisfying sex life is something many desire and appreciate. Sex is a normal aspect of our lives. Many of us take sex for granted without thinking about its importance or without thinking about the choices we have taken related to sex. Responsible sex is about making the correct choices for ourselves and our partners based on mutual respect, open communication and honesty and looking after our health as well the health of our partners.

Who men have sex with

Some of us are in relationships or married, others are single. Some of us have several sexual partners. Many men only have sex with women, while many of us have sex with both men and women. Others only have sex with men. A few of us call ourselves gay. Some of us call ourselves bisexual because we are attracted to both women and men. We cannot choose whether we are attracted to women, to men or to both; this is not something we can decide. However, we can choose how many men or women we have sex with. Having sex with fewer people reduces our risk of becoming HIV-positive. Having sex with someone underage is illegal and all sex should be consensual (with agreement).

What sex men have

There are many different kinds of sex. Kissing, oral sex (blow job), anal sex, vaginal sex, thigh sex, group sex and mutual masturbation are all sex acts we can choose to do with our partners. Some of these acts are more risky for getting HIV than others. For example, anal sex without a condom and water-based lubrication poses a very high risk of getting HIV or passing it to others. We can also choose to believe a partner when they tell us they are HIV negative, or to treat all our partners as being able to infect us.

When men have sex

We can have sex when we are feeling in control of ourselves or we can have sex when we have been drinking or taking drugs and might not be able to make responsible choices. If we think we are going to have anal or vaginal sex we should ensure we have access to condoms and water-based lubrication.

HIV: Transmission And Treatment - HIV Screening

What Men Should Know

HIV screening (testing) is quick, easy and accurate. Only a tiny drop of blood is needed (from a finger-prick) and the result is available within a few minutes.

The screening checks if there are HIV antibodies (produced by your immune system to defend you against the virus) in your blood. These antibodies take about 3 months to develop from the time that you were exposed to the virus. This period, while you wait for possible antibodies to develop, is called the window period. This means you must confirm your result again after 3 months, in order to be sure of your status.

If you are concerned that you may have been exposed to HIV, either through someone else's semen, blood or anal fluid, having a test and receiving a negative result will put your mind at rest. If the result is positive, you can access counselling and the correct medical services, which can ensure that you lead a long, healthy life.

Avoid waiting until you show symptoms or feel sick before you get screened – the sooner you know your status, the sooner you can manage it. All sexually active people should have an HIV screening at least every 6 months.

HIV: Transmission And Treatment - HIV Transmission

What Men Should Know

HIV is transmitted (spread) from a person who is infected with HIV to somebody else through the body fluids of the person who is HIV-positive. We need two things for this to happen: a high-risk body fluid and an entry point into the bloodstream.

A High-risk Body Fluid	An Entry Point Into The Bloodstream
<p>Not all body fluids contain the same amount (concentration) of the virus.</p> <p>Body fluids that are high risk for HIV transmission* are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Semen (cum)● Blood <p>Body fluids that are a lower risk for HIV transmission are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Pre-ejaculate (pre-cum)● Vaginal fluid <p>Other fluids (urine, sweat, tears, saliva) do not pose a risk for HIV infection.</p> <p>* We don't know for sure but it seems that anal fluid (produced in the rectum during anal sex) also poses a high risk of infection.</p>	<p>The virus cannot enter your body through your intact (unbroken) skin. Ways in which HIV can get into your bloodstream are through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● The lining of your rectum (ass)*● Any broken skin, like a sore or cut● Any cuts or sores in or around your mouth● Your eyes● Sharing a needle with someone else <p>* Unprotected (without a condom and water-based lube) anal sex poses the highest risk for HIV infection because the virus can pass directly through the lining of the rectum (ass) into the bloodstream. Anyone who is a bottom (receptive or passive partner) during anal sex is therefore at a very high</p>

	risk of infection and should always insist that the top (insertive or active partner) always wears a condom.
<p>Responsible sex is about preventing two things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A high-risk body fluid from someone who may be positive2. Passing the virus into the bloodstream of someone who is negative. <p>The easiest way to prevent HIV transmission is to always use a condom and water-based lubricant every time you have anal sex and not to get someone else's semen (cum) in your mouth or eyes. Before you have sex cover any broken skin (cuts, sores or blisters) properly with a plaster and never share needles. Having sex with fewer people will also help reduce your risk of becoming HIV positive.</p>	

HIV Prevention

HIV Prevention - Changing your behaviour to reduce risk

What Men Should Know

Anal sex without a condom is a very risky behaviour for becoming infected with HIV or giving it to somebody else. The risk of HIV transmission through anal sex without a condom and water-based lubricant is about 18 times higher than for vaginal sex.

Here Are A Few Things You Can Do To Lower Your Risk:

1. Use a condom and water-based lubricant (lube) every time you have anal sex. If you are the bottom (receptive) partner, always insist that the top (penetrating) partner wears a condom and uses water-based lubricant.
2. It is crucial that you use the correct, water-based lubricants, with condoms. Using the incorrect oil-based lubricants with condoms will cause the condom to break.
3. Have sex with fewer men. Having sex with fewer men will lower your chances of getting or spreading HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
4. Stop having sex if you (or your partner) have any symptoms of an STI, such as a sore, blister, rash or a wart on or around your penis or anus, or if there is a discharge (leaking) from your penis or anus. Go to your clinic or doctor and get treatment before you have sex again.

The risk of getting infected with HIV is much higher for the bottom (receptive) partner than the top (penetrating) partner. This is because the bottom guy is more likely to get semen (cum) inside his anus, which is the easiest way to get HIV.

If you are HIV-positive you must limit the risk of infecting an HIV-negative partner.

HIV Prevention - Condoms

What Men Should Know

Love them or hate them, consistent use of condoms remains your best defence against HIV and other STIs. Condoms are effective because they prevent the exchange of body fluids that might contain HIV: semen (cum) and blood. Even guys who are HIV-positive should use condoms every time they have sex to help prevent spreading HIV and getting other STIs. Condoms and water-based lubricant belong together, just like rice and beans!

Using A Male Condom

When using a male condom, remember the following:

- Guys who are bottom (receptive) sometimes say the sex feels better without a condom. This is not true – the inside of the anus cannot feel a condom.
- Never use more than one condom at the same time.
- If you are having group sex (with more than one partner at the same time), use a fresh condom every time you penetrate a new partner to avoid spreading HIV and other STIs.

HIV Prevention - Lubrication

What Men Should Know

Lubricant, or lube, is a slippery jelly-like product that is designed for use during sex. Using the right lube makes anal sex safer by preventing condoms breaking. It also makes anal sex much more comfortable, enjoyable and fun.

Lube is vital for anal sex, since the anus does not produce enough fluid for comfortable sex (unlike a vagina). Dry sex without lube can damage the soft lining of the anus, increasing the risk of getting HIV or other STIs.

With male condoms you must only use water-based lube such as KY jelly. Never use any product that contains oil, such as baby oil, body or hand lotions, butter or margarine, Vaseline or cooking oil. Oil in any product damages a male condom, leading to the spread of HIV or other STIs.

Saliva (spit) is not slippery enough to be used as lube.

Always put plenty of lube on the opening of the anus before you start having sex. If the sex starts to feel dry or sticky, or carries on for a long time, use more lube to protect the condom.

Living With HIV

Living With HIV

Testing HIV positive often leaves people feeling overwhelmed, confused and scared. It is important to remember that HIV is a manageable infection that can be controlled, but not cured, with HIV medicines (called antiretrovirals or ARVs)

Knowing your status (whether HIV negative or positive) allows you to make decisions about looking after your health. If you are HIV positive, you may have a lot of questions and it is a good idea to ask to speak to someone who can help answer your questions– see the contact section on afya4men.info.

WHAT MEN SHOULD KNOW

HIV positive people who take treatment correctly can have a normal quality of life and live a normal lifespan.

The virus HIV affects your immune system. Health workers know how HIV is affecting your body by doing a simple blood test called a CD4 count. Your CD4 count tells health workers how strong your immune system is. It will help guide you and your doctor decide when to start taking HIV medicines (antiretroviral treatment or ARVs). Current world guidelines say you should start treatment when your CD4 count approaches 500.

Health workers may also do a test called a Viral Load, which tells you how strong the HIV is in your blood. Viral load tests are not always available, however these tests tell you and your doctor how well the HIV medicine is doing at treating HIV.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as syphilis, hepatitis or genital warts can be very serious for HIV positive men. It is important to learn as much as you can about HIV, STIs and sexual health: A good place to start is the section on Afya4Men.info on Sexually Transmitted Infections.

Living With HIV - Disclosure and Sexual Partners

Disclosure, or telling people you are HIV positive, can help you accept your own HIV positive status and can help you access the care, support and medical services that you need. Openness about your HIV positive status may make it easier to negotiate responsible sex and to prevent others becoming infected.

In addition to telling health care workers about your status it is important to have a friend or family member who can support you. Plan ahead before you disclose your HIV positive status, so that you can be safe and feel in control of the process. Think about who you might tell first, and how, when and where you will tell them.

It may be better to disclose gradually – to your partner, or to one trusted friend or to one member of your family you feel especially close to – rather than to everyone at once.

When possible, you should also tell your sexual partner(s) that you are HIV positive, so that they can be checked for HIV. Men who have tested positive should use condoms and water based lubricants with all their sexual partners.

HIV Treatment And Anti-retroviral Medications (ARVS)

What Men Should Know

Treatment of HIV relies on the use of a combination of anti-HIV medications (drugs) to keep a person healthy. These drugs are called antiretrovirals (ARVs).

ARVs work by controlling and blocking the virus's ability to replicate (produce more of itself). This allows the immune system to recover and to protect the body from other infections (such as TB).

It is a bad idea to start and then stop ARV treatment repeatedly. In order to work, ARVs need to be taken exactly as prescribed, which also means taking them at the correct time every day, for the rest of your life. Some men are worried about the side effects (negative effects) of ARVs, but modern therapy allows for minimal, predictable and easily-managed side effects.

Deciding when to begin ARV treatment depends on your health and your readiness to take the treatment. Although early treatment is highly recommended, it is never too late to benefit from ARV treatment.

Ask at your local hospital or clinic about the availability of free ARVs.

- ARVs are drugs that stop HIV from reproducing in the body
- ARVs suppress the virus, prevent infections, improve the way people feel and increase their lifespan
- Modern ARVs are convenient, produce minimal side effects and allow a normal quality of life

Living With HIV - What Else You Can Do

Eat healthy foods and get enough sleep and exercise. Eating a balanced diet is important, including fruits and vegetables. Avoid drinking too much alcohol, which is bad for your liver. Your body needs all the help it can to look after itself so avoid doing things that add extra stress on your body or yourself.

Like everyone else men living with HIV will still catch a cold or malaria. If you feel very sick, rather than worrying, go and see a health worker.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) - Syphilis

What Men Should Know

What Is It?

This STI causes one or more painless sores on the lips, mouth, penis, anus or inside the rectum about a month after infection. If it isn't treated the sores heal on their own but you are still infected. Later symptoms include rashes on the skin and in the mouth. Long-term untreated infection can cause problems of the heart, eyes, brain and other organs. If left untreated it will cause death.

Treatment can cure syphilis and prevent serious problems occurring later.

YOU ARE UP TO FIVE TIMES MORE LIKELY TO GET HIV OR TO INFECT A PARTNER IF EITHER OF YOU HAVE SYPHILIS.

How Do You Get It?

You get it through direct contact with a syphilis sore, normally during unprotected (without a condom) anal or oral sex, rubbing penises together or sharing sex toys. Syphilis sores can be inside the mouth or anus so you cannot always recognise if your sex partner has syphilis.

How Do You Know If You Have It?

Things to look out for in stage 1 (1-3 months after you get it):

- A painless sore, as described above

Things to look out for in stage 2 (3-6 months):

- General rash anywhere on the body but often on the palms and soles
- Sores in mouth or anus

Things to look out for in stage 3 (many years):

- Feeling sick for a long period of time
- Pins and needles (tingling) in your hands and feet
- Joint pain
- Skin diseases
- Numbness and weakness of the limbs
- Eye problems
- Confusion

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) - Gonorrhea And Chlamydia

What Men Should Know

What Are They?

They are STIs caused by bacterial germs producing similar symptoms (signs of infection). These include a white or yellow discharge (dripping) from the penis, or an infection of the anus or mouth. It may take 1 – 10 days after exposure to the germ before symptoms appear. Some guys can have gonorrhea or chlamydia germs in their body without developing any symptoms. These STIs can be cured by taking antibiotics.

How Do You Get Them?

These STIs are spread through unprotected (without a condom) sexual contact (oral sex, rimming or anal sex). Infection can occur even if you are not exposed to semen or blood from your sex partner. Always use a condom and water-based lubrication.

How Do You Know If You Have Them?

Things to look out for:

- Pain or burning when urinating (pissing)
- Discharge that often looks like pus or milky fluid (dripping) from your penis
- Painful testicles (balls)
- Pain or swelling of the scrotum (ball bag)
- Sore throat that does not heal on its own or with the usual antibiotic treatments
- Redness, or swelling of the tongue
- Redness, pain, sores around or discharge from the anus

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) - Herpes

What Men Should Know

What Is It?

Herpes is an STI that causes small blisters on your lips, or the foreskin or shaft of the penis, or around the anus. The blisters contain fluid and cause painful sores when they burst. You can't always see herpes, and it can take 2 to 20 days after infection before symptoms (signs) occur. Herpes can be treated but not cured. It will come back when a person is sick, stressed or has a suppressed (low) immune system (for example, because of HIV).

How Do You Get It?

Herpes is spread through unprotected sexual contact (oral sex, rimming or anal sex) and direct contact with the blister or sore. The blister fluid is very infectious.

How Do You Know If You Have It?

Things to look out for in herpes Type 1 (seldom causing blisters on sexual organs):

- Fever blisters on the lips or around your mouth

Things to look out for in herpes Type 2 (usually causing blisters on sexual organs):

- Small blisters that burst, leaving painful sores
- Itching or tingling in the genital area (penis and balls) or anal area
- Needing to urinate (piss) often

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) - Warts

What Men Should Know

What Is It?

This is a common STI that causes small, painless bumps to appear on the penis, scrotum (ball bag) or anus. Warts are hard, crusty bumps that grow on the skin. If they are not treated they sometimes spread to other parts of the body, and can lead to cancer of the penis and anus. It takes 1 to 6 months after infection before warts start appearing. There is no cure for this infection. Warts can be removed by burning, freezing or a small operation (for example, if they are inside your anus), but they may come back and treatment must be repeated. Some special skin creams can help treat small warts.

How Do You Get It?

Warts are spread through unprotected sexual contact (oral sex, rimming and anal sex) and direct contact with the warts. The germ can still be spread even if no warts are visible on the skin.

How Do You Know If You Have It?

Things to look out for:

- Warts on the penis, on your scrotum (ball bag) and around or inside your anus. They are not painful, but can become itchy, burning and uncomfortable and may bleed
- Warts can spread to other parts of the body

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) - Hepatitis

What Men Should Know

Hepatitis refers to liver inflammation. There are a number of germs that can be spread sexually and cause liver problems, including hepatitis A, B and C. All three cause jaundice (yellow eyes), nausea, abdominal pain and vomiting.

Hepatitis A (HEP A)

This is usually spread when an infected person fails to wash their hands properly after defecation (using the toilet). Hep A is not an STI for heterosexual people who only have vaginal sex, but for people having anal sex or rimming (licking a partner's anus) there is a risk of ingesting tiny amounts of faeces (shit) that might contain the germ. Hep A can be prevented with a vaccine. Infection can make you very ill but you will recover without any long-term problems.

Hepatitis B (HEP B)

This is the most common hepatitis among adults. It spreads easily during unprotected sex even if there is no exposure to blood or semen (cum). You can also get this germ through saliva (spit). It remains in the body for a very long period after infection, causing liver damage and a risk of cancer. Hep B can be prevented with a vaccine. It is difficult to cure but can be controlled with the same medications used to treat HIV.

Hepatitis C (HEP C)

This is spread mainly by needle-sharing among drug users and unprotected (without a condom) anal sex. The germ stays in your body and causes long-term liver damage. Sometimes it can be cured with very expensive medications but these often fail. There is no vaccine to prevent Hep C.

Recreational Drugs And Substance Abuse

Recreational Drugs And Substance Abuse

What Men Should Know

Recreational drug use refers to using substances to cause a temporary change in how people feel about themselves. Examples include people using alcohol or illegal drugs to escape reality or to make sex better. Recreational drugs can cause serious damage when they impair the normal functioning of the body, increasing one's risk of heart and liver disease, neurological disorders and sexual dysfunction. When taken in an overdose they can also kill you.

Substance abuse refers to the incorrect usage of medical drugs such as cough mixtures, sleeping tablets or pain killers.

Drugs And Sex

Some people use drugs to make sex better. Some drugs can intensify sexual pleasure but they can also decrease inhibitions and contribute to risky sex, leading to HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Drugs And Needles

Intravenous drug use (injecting, using needles) is the highest risk for HIV and other diseases if people share needles or drug preparation equipment. Another concern is that some people who start off drinking, smoking or snorting (sniffing) drugs may escalate to injecting them.

Drugs And ARVs

People who are taking ARVs (medication used to treat HIV) are more likely to forget to take their medication if they are high on drugs or drunk. Some recreational and other drugs interact with ARVs in harmful ways, leading to unexpected side effects and even overdoses. Using recreational drugs suppresses the immune system and can make ARVs less effective. Some people abuse ARVs by smoking them with tobacco or marijuana (cannabis) which is very dangerous.

What Can You Do To Reduce Your Risk?

Recreational drug use is harmful to your health. If you do not use drugs, avoid starting this behaviour even if your friends encourage you to party with them. If you do use drugs, avoid becoming dependent on them. Even if you only use drugs over weekends you could still be dependent or addicted. Never mix different drugs at the same time, as they may interact with each other, and always use a minimal amount. Before you progress to injecting drugs, seek help: injecting drugs is often an indication of addiction. If you do inject drugs, never share needles with other people.

Recreational Drugs And Substance Abuse - Types Of Drugs

What Men Should Know

Alcohol

Alcohol is the most commonly abused recreational substance. It can lower inhibitions, cause poor judgement and therefore also increase your risk of engaging in irresponsible sex. Studies have found that drinking alcohol before engaging in sex significantly increases the likelihood of engaging in riskier sex.

Long-term alcohol abuse contributes to erectile dysfunction and liver damage. Liver damage is an especially serious concern should someone need to start taking ARVs (treatment for HIV). Liver damage can decrease your ability to tolerate ARVs.

Other drugs can be divided into two groups, depending on the effect they have on you. Note however that people respond differently to various drugs. Both 'uppers' and 'downers' can easily lead to addiction.

Uppers – Stimulants

Uppers are drugs that stimulate the brain. They induce a sense of temporary well-being and confidence. After this sensation there is usually a period of feeling down, or depressed. This can make people want to use more stimulants in order to feel better. This process can cause addiction very quickly.

Uppers include the following:

MDMA and Ecstasy: Also called E, Love Drug, XTC, X

Cocaine: Also called coke, chanel

Khat: Also called mairungi, miraa, gomba, cat, kitty

Crystal Methamphetamine: Also called tik, tina, crystal, meths, krank, tweak, ice, X-tina, sugar, glass

DOWNERS – DEPRESSANTS

Downers decrease mental or physical functioning, and have a relaxing effect. After using these substances individuals may feel very anxious or agitated, and want to use them repeatedly. This can easily lead to dependence and addiction.

Heroin: Also called smack, skag, brown, H, brown sugar, white junk.

Marijuana: Also called dagga, cannabis, weed, blunt, grass, herb, boom, joint, spliff, ganja, hash, skunk, pot

Mandrax: Also called buttons, smarties, double barrels, happy pills, mandies, mandrake or mandrix

GHB: Also called Liquid E or G

Alcohol: Alcohol is the most commonly used downer