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Lifestyle Concerns for People with Gender Issues

Protection against H.I.V. and Other Dangerous Viruses

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Only condoms can help protect you during intercourse from the H.I.V. virus and other sexually transmissible diseases.

All people are at risk of catching the H.I.V./AIDS virus regardless of their age, gender or sexuality. Unprotected anal or vaginal sex are known high risk practices for transmitting H.I.V.

Sharing needles or exposure to contaminated blood and blood products is also known to easily transmit H.I.V. Oral sex may also be a risk if the receptive partner has lesions (e.g. cuts, ulcers, gum disease, recent dental work) in the mouth.

People with gender issues, however, face unique risks and it is most important to be aware of these. This article is to help you and your sexual partners manage these risks.

If you have an offensive smelling vagina then see a doctor rather than douche, as an unpleasant smell could be a symptom of a sexually transmitted disease.

How Can I Protect Myself:

Hair Removal

If you shave or wax your body or pubic hair, be careful of cuts and scraping. Cover any cuts and abrasions before sex and never allow anyone's body fluids (blood, semen or vaginal fluids) on damaged skin. Be particularly careful if you shave your pubic hair, legs, chest or armpits and then engage in "trick sex" (having intercourse between closed thighs or under armpits etc.)

Needles

Some people may use syringes/needles for hormone injections. H.I.V. and other dangerous viruses including hepatitis can hitch a ride in a shared needle or syringe. If you inject your own hormones or help friends with theirs, keep a clean supply and never share needles or syringes.

Needles and syringes are available from the Gender Centre Needle Exchange program. They stock correct size needles and syringes for the administration of hormones and for intravenous drug use.

For 24 hour information on needle exchange services call A.D.I.S. on 9331 2111. Needles and syringes can also be obtained from many chemists as part of their exchange programs for a small fee.

Taping, Strapping and Tucking

If you are taping, strapping or tucking you could create a warm moist area leading to skin disorders, chaffing and dermatitis.

Removing tape roughly could result in damaged or broken skin. Any of these increase the risk of the virus penetrating your skin during sex, particularly if you get someone else's body fluids onto that region, as might happen from unprotected "trick" sex.

So: Always use condoms.

Try to keep these areas as dry and clean as possible (unscented sterilized talcum powder may help) and let them breath a bit when you're in private.

Remove tape carefully and remove any traces of adhesive with something gentle and soothing like eucalyptus oil.

Surgery

If you have recently undergone any surgery that has involved any areas of your body that may be exposed to body fluids during sex, then be sure to cover the area until your skin has completely healed.

Douching

If you have a neo-vagina (created through surgery), a natural vagina or engage in receptive anal intercourse you may practise douching to keep these passages clean. Douching weakens the lining of the anal passage or vagina and removes friendly bacteria and mucous, exposing the porous membranes (surface skin lining) and increasing the risk of H.I.V. transmission and the risk of contracting general infections.

The practice of frequent douching is generally discouraged by health workers. If you feel you must douche for personal comfort, then it should only be practised once a week at most.

If you have a vagina then it is best to try and keep it slightly acidic as this will minimise the damage to friendly bacteria, while discouraging infections. This can be achieved by using a product called aci-gel that can be bought at the chemist. Use about a third to a quarter of an applicator two times a week. If you continue to douche, try to maintain the acidity by using a mixture of warm water and vinegar (one part vinegar to twenty parts water).

Remember douching and gels are not an alternative for safe sex. Only condoms can help protect you during intercourse from the H.I.V. virus and other sexually transmissible diseases.

Douche equipment should never be shared without thorough cleaning between uses.

If you have an offensive smelling vagina then see a doctor rather than douche, as an unpleasant smell could be a symptom of a sexually transmitted disease. Doctors who work in women's health, for example through Family Planning N.S.W. have experience in vaginal care.

Remember you have the right to be treated with respect when receiving medical treatment.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.