

## *Who are intersex people*

Intersex people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit stereotypical definitions of male and female. Many different forms of intersex exist; it is an umbrella term, rather than a single variation.

Some common intersex traits are diagnosed prenatally. Intersex variations may be apparent at birth or become apparent at puberty, or when trying to conceive, or through random chance.

## *How common are intersex people?*

The lowest popular statistic is around 1 in 2,000 people (.05% of births) but a more likely figure may be closer to 1.7%. This makes intersex differences about as common as red hair.

## *Are intersex and hermaphrodite the same?*

Biologically, no. Hermaphrodites (such as snails) possess fully functioning sets of both “male” and “female” sex organs. This is impossible in mammals.

Linguistically, the word originates in the Greek myth of Hermaphroditus who was both male and female, having elements of both sexes.

Some intersex diagnoses have been termed “pseudo-hermaphrodites” or “true-hermaphrodites”. While some intersex people use the term, others find it stigmatising due to this medical history. If in doubt, it is best only used by people with intersex variations.

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## *Do intersex people have health issues?*

Intersex people, like all people, have health issues. In a few diagnoses, immediate medical attention is needed from birth, but being intersex is not a health issue in and of itself. Natural intersex bodies are most often healthy.

Intersex people frequently need hormone replacement therapy. This may be due to medical intervention.

## *Why are intersex people subjected to medical intervention?*

Medical intervention attempts to make the bodies of people with intersex variations conform to ideals of male or female. Current medical protocols are based on the ideas that infant genital surgery and other interventions will “minimise family concern and distress” and “mitigate the risks of stigmatisation and gender-identity confusion”.

Surgical interventions intrinsically focus on appearance, and not sensation or sexual function. Childhood cosmetic genital surgeries and sex hormone treatments are also problematic as children cannot consent to them. Adolescents, and even adults, have also reported pressure by doctors or families to conform to societal norms. Some doctors still believe that disclosure of a person’s intersex status would be too alarming.

Very many intersex people suffer the physical and emotional effects from such medical treatments, and related shame and secrecy. At a fundamental level, homophobia, intolerance and ancient superstitions underpin contemporary mistreatment of people with intersex differences.

## *What is DSD?*

In 2006, a group of doctors replaced the umbrella term intersex with “Disorders of Sex Development” or DSD. The collective term DSD reinforces the idea that intersex traits are individual medical conditions or disorders that need to be fixed.

There are some intersex people who use the term today – especially when accessing healthcare, or when first taught DSD by parents or doctors. People with intersex variations are free to use any label, but the term intersex has become even more accepted and widespread today.

Stigmatising language leads to poor mental health, marginalisation, and exclusion from human rights and social institutions. The term intersex promotes equality and human rights for people born with atypical sex characteristics.

## *What gender identities do intersex people have?*

Intersex is a lived experience of the body and intersex people have a broad range of gender identities, just like non-intersex people. The identities of people with intersex variations may sometimes not match our appearance. Having a non-binary gender identity does not automatically make someone intersex.

## *Are intersex people transgender or gender diverse?*

The gender identities of intersex people frequently match our assignments at birth, and sometimes they may be freely chosen. Some people who have chosen their gender may identify as transgender or gender diverse. Intersex bodies have diverse physical sex characteristics; many intersex people have an experience of involuntary medical treatment to impose stereotypical sex characteristics, or are at risk of this. This makes descriptions of intersex people as “cis” or “cisgender” problematic.

## *Are intersex people gay, lesbian, or queer?*

It depends on the individual, how they define their gender and identity, how they present, and who they form relationships with. Every intersex person is different. Some people with intersex variations are LGB or queer, and some are heterosexual. We share common goals with the LGBT movement as we all fall outside of expected sex and gender norms. Intersex is part of LGBTI because of intersex status and a shared experience of stigma based on sex and gender norms, not because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

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