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As Trans People, do we Create Our Own Barriers to Health?

We Can't Expect More from our Health-Care and Service Providers than we are Willing to Give Ourselves

by Matt Kailey

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It's up to all of us to take responsibility for our own health and to make our providers aware of our needs.

If you are a pre-op or non-op transmale, how many times do you tell your treatment providers that you have a vagina? Do you talk openly about using testosterone and inform your providers about where you get it, how you administer it, and the physical effects it can have on your body? Do you discuss how and with whom you have sex? Are your providers informed enough to ask questions about needle and vial sharing, black market hormones and safer sex for someone with your body type?

When we are honest, we are more likely to get the advice and the care that can keep us, and our sexual partners, healthy.

If you are a pre-op or non-op transfemale, substitute vagina for penis and testosterone for oestrogen and read the above questions again, then think about your answers. Are we setting up our own barriers to proper H.I.V./AIDS prevention and treatment as well as other necessary medical care?

Certainly there are things that are nobody's business and, as trans people, we don't need to discuss every personal issue with everyone we talk to. But if we're not informing our health care and service providers about our bodies and what we do with them, we're creating a situation that could prevent us from getting adequate information about, and treatment for, various health related conditions. Yes, we want our providers to be educated on trans issues, and yes, we are tired of doing some of that education, but we can't expect more from our health care and service providers than we are willing to give ourselves. What kinds of things should we as trans people be aware of when thinking about protecting ourselves and others from the spread of H.I.V./AIDS?

First, let's look at hormones. The majority of transmen and many transwomen are using needles to administer testosterone and oestrogen. Twenty cents may seem like a small price to pay for a sterile, fresh needle, but when you don't have it, there isn't much difference between twenty cents and twenty dollars - hence needle sharing occurs, which we all know can be a dangerous practice. If you are sharing needles, talk to your provider about getting a bleach kit, learn the correct way to use it, and use it every time you share a needle. Even if you're not sharing needles, if you are sharing a vial, make sure you don't stick a used needle back into the vial for any reason.

In order to protect your health, make sure you know where your hormones are coming from and who is administering them to you, if you aren't doing it yourself.

Non-reputable people who are offering hormone shots are generally not concerned about how many times they use a needle or how many used needles might have been reinserted into a vial.

And we all know that some shots are gushers. If you are H.I.V. positive, it's important to protect others who might be giving you a shot. Health care providers generally use protection, such as gloves, but partners, friends, or acquaintances who are helping you might not think about it. A few minor precautions can protect you and those around you when you're taking hormones by injection.

And when you're thinking about sex (don't lie, you are), think about the needs of your transsexual body. If you have a vagina and are using it, you need to be aware of the extra risk of tissue tears for certain vaginas. The use of testosterone can cause the vagina to become dryer, shorter and less flexible, thus making it more vulnerable to tearing, which can create an entry point for H.I.V. or, if you're positive, a way for you to transmit the virus. Surgically constructed vaginas don't self-lubricate, also making them more prone to tearing. So whatever you're packing, pack some extra lube.

If you are factory equipped with a penis and you tuck, the skin of your dick can sometimes become chafed and even bleed, which provides an entry point for H.I.V. or a way for the virus to be transmitted if you're positive. If you have a surgically constructed dick, be aware of infections that can cause blood to accumulate or pus to form.

In reality, any of these risks can be significantly lessened with the use of protection - a male or female condom. But some of us aren't

using them. Why? There are a variety of reasons, none of which really stands up under scrutiny.

Internalised transphobia:

"I don't deserve to stay healthy" or "I'm basically worthless, so who cares if I get sick and maybe die". This one is tough to deal with. If you're feeling worthless, if you're feeling self-hatred. If you don't think your life is worth saving, then professional help is definitely warranted. Ask your health care provider for a therapist recommendation, or call your local gender centre or [L.G.B.T. services centre](#).

More internalised transphobia:

"I finally found someone who doesn't care that I'm trans. I'm not going to screw this up by insisting on using a condom." This also stems from self-hatred - as if you are darn lucky that anyone wants to have sex with you. But how lucky could you be if your potential sex-partner doesn't care about your sex or his/her own.

Validation as a gay man:

I have heard some gay transmen say that becoming infected with [H.I.V.](#) will validate their gay male identity. It will also necessitate coming-out twice to potential partners - as a transman and as an [H.I.V.](#)-positive man. And because both testosterone and [H.I.V.](#) medications (and most medications) are processed through the liver, if the liver is damaged, it can come down to a choice - [H.I.V.](#) meds or hormones. Do you really want to make that choice?

Problems with genitalia:

In some cases, this is just more self-hatred, and in others it simply goes along with being trans, but in either case, if it is difficult for you to acknowledge your genitals, you might also find it difficult to look at or touch them in order to protect yourself and others. Applying a male or female condom makes you more conscious of genitalia that you might want to forget. This is a tough one, and if it is preventing you from using protection you may want to consult with a therapist or another provider.

Uneducated/Untrained providers:

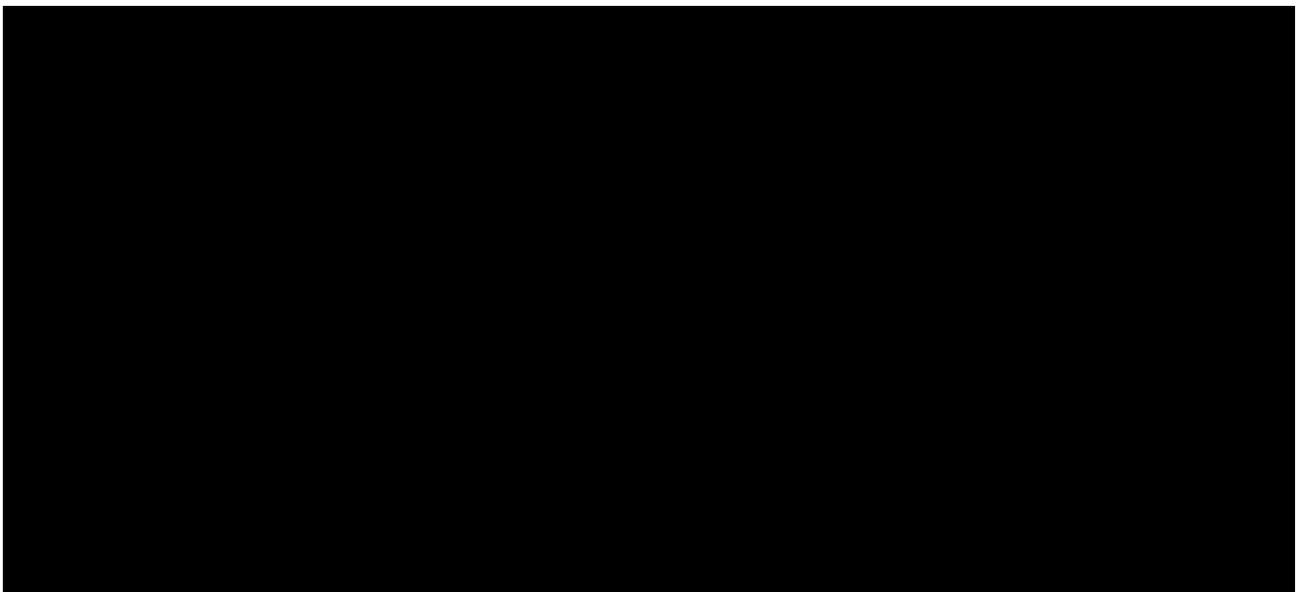
Your provider won't know you're injecting hormones unless you reveal it. Your provider won't know you don't have a dick/vagina unless you tell him or her. If you have not come-out as trans, and your provider is talking to you about body parts you don't have or discussing sexuality in a way that doesn't apply to you, the only way you can correct it is to be honest about who you are and what your needs are. Many [H.I.V./AIDS](#) centres are trans-friendly and will give you the opportunity to identify yourself on an intake sheet or in an initial interview. But the majority of health care providers still don't do this. It's up to all of us to take responsibility for our own health and to make our providers aware of our needs. When we are honest, we are more likely to get the advice and the care that can keep us, and our sexual partners, healthy.

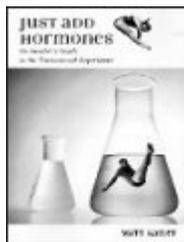
Matt Kailey

From Matt's Blog:  Matt Kailey is an American transsexual man and an award-winning author, blogger, teacher, and community leader, as well as a nationally recognized speaker and trainer on transgender issues. He is the author of *Just Add Hormones: An Insider's Guide to the Transsexual Experience* (Beacon Press), and *Teeny Weenies and Other Short Subjects*, a collection of humorous and heartfelt essays about his life before and after transition. In addition, his work has appeared in numerous publications, from anthologies to professional journals. He is also a media personality who has appeared on local and national American radio and television, in local and national American print publications, and in five documentary films.



Visit Matt's Blog " [Tranifesto](#) " .





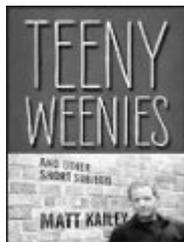
Just Add Hormones: An Insider's Guide to the Transsexual Experience

Author: Matt Kailey

Publisher: Beacon Press (2006)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 0807079591

From Amazon Books: 📖 Matt Kailey lived as a straight woman for the first forty-two years of his life. Though happy as a social worker and teacher, he knew something wasn't right. Then he made some changes. With the help of a good therapist, chest surgery, and some strong doses of testosterone, Kailey began his journey toward becoming a man. As his body morphed and his voice dropped, Kailey began noticing subtle shifts in the way he was treated. Men suddenly stopped offering to change flat tires for him but insisted on talking to him about women and bodily functions. Women got nervous when he baby-talked to their infants but routinely asked him to move heavy things around the office. In these everyday exchanges, Kailey recognized the many ways we define what it means to be male. He also realized that, with few role models, he had to learn to accept himself as a person between two genders. As he writes about his transition from female to male, Kailey answers all the questions you've ever had about what it's like to live as a transsexual. From the fear of public restrooms to deciding whether to "pack" his pants, Kailey explains what the world looks like from his new vantage point - a position more people are discovering as gender transitions become increasingly common. More than a memoir, *Just Add Hormones* is full of sound advice for those who may be questioning their gender. And through his story, Kailey offers valuable insights to the families and friends of those who have started a transition. Funny, fresh, and incredibly candid, *Just Add Hormones* can help us all consider - and even laugh at - our own notions of what it means to be a man or a woman.



Teeny Weenies: And Other Short Subjects

Author: Matt Kailey

Publisher: Outskirts Press (2012)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 1432781200

From Amazon Books: 📖 With Miss America and a collection of Playboy centrefolds as role models, a young girl struggles to figure out femininity, only to discover that she was headed in the wrong direction all along. When she finally realizes that being the best girl - and woman - she can be is no match for being the man she's supposed to be, there's only one solution, and it's not another purse, pair of pumps, or push-up bra. *Teeny Weenies and Other Short Subjects* takes a long, hard look at getting the short end of the stick, both before and after transition from female to male. This collection of humorous essays from award-winning author and transsexual man Matt Kailey explores identity, sexuality, and growing up female in a world with two sexes, two genders - and no exceptions.

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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.