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things you need to know about HIV



Camden **NHS**
Primary Care Trust

LONDON GAY MEN'S
HIV Prevention Partnership

THT DIRECT – 0845 1221 200
Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm
Sat & Sun, noon-6pm

NATIONAL SEXUAL HEALTH LINE – 0800 567 123,
freephone, 24 hours

NHS DIRECT – 0845 4647

For details of sexual health clinics in London, visit
www.metromate.org.uk

contacts

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HIV is a virus that can cause AIDS, a serious, incurable and often fatal illness.

More than 10,000 gay men have died in the UK from HIV-related illnesses since 1982. In recent years, thanks to new drug treatments, the annual number of deaths has dramatically declined.

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There is no cure for HIV infection.

Once you are infected with HIV, you are infected for life. Someone who is infected with HIV is HIV-positive. Someone who isn't infected with HIV is HIV-negative. More than 25,000 gay men living in the UK are HIV-positive. A third of them don't know it. Around 2,000 gay men are diagnosed HIV-positive each year in the UK.

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You cannot tell just by looking if someone is HIV-positive or not.

HIV-positive men look just as fit and healthy as HIV-negative men. Don't assume that a man must be negative because he hasn't told you that he's positive. He may be positive and not know it — or he may know that he's positive and not want to talk about it. Likewise, don't assume that a man must be positive just because he hasn't told you he's negative.

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HIV is not easy to catch.

HIV cannot be passed from one person to another by touching, kissing or hugging.

It can only be passed on:

- during unprotected penetrative sex;
- by sharing syringes or other drug injecting equipment;
- from mother to baby.

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The most common way that gay men become HIV-positive is through unprotected anal sex.

If an HIV-negative man and an HIV-positive man have unprotected anal sex, the negative man is at risk of being infected with HIV. If he's the one being fucked, he risks absorbing the virus in his partner's semen through the lining of his arse. If he's doing the fucking, he risks absorbing the virus in his partner's arse through his urethra or the sensitive skin at the head of his penis.

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Using condoms for anal sex will protect you and your partners from HIV.

If you are not sure that both you and your partner are HIV-negative or if you know that one of you is positive, then using condoms correctly, with plenty of condom-safe (ie water-based or silicone-based) lubricant, will protect both of you from being infected with HIV (and many other sexually transmitted infections).

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If you have unprotected anal sex, there is a drug treatment called PEP which may prevent you from becoming HIV-positive.

Condoms can break, slip off or be forgotten in the heat of passion. If this happens, and one of you is HIV-positive and the other isn't, PEP may prevent the HIV-negative man from becoming infected. PEP (a four-week course of anti-HIV drugs) must be started within 72 hours. Find out more by visiting www.pep.chapsonline.org.uk or ringing a sexual health clinic.

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Oral sex (sucking) is much less risky than unprotected anal sex, but it is not entirely without risk.

To further reduce the risk from oral sex:

- don't cum in his mouth;
- don't let him cum in your mouth;
- don't suck if you have any sores or cuts in your mouth or if you have a sore throat;
- don't floss or brush your teeth before or immediately after sucking – you may damage your gums.

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A low viral load doesn't mean
no viral load.

HIV-positive men have regular tests to measure their viral load (the amount of HIV in their blood). Having an 'undetectable viral load' does not mean a man is no longer infectious – he may have a much higher viral load in his semen. In other words, an HIV-positive man who has an undetectable viral load can still pass on HIV through unprotected anal sex.

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Regular HIV tests are good for you

Too many men find out that they are HIV-positive when they are already very ill. It is much better to find out as early as possible so that you can start treatment while you are well. That way, the treatment is more likely to be successful in keeping you from getting seriously ill. The HIV test is free and confidential at any sexual health clinic.

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