

LGBT

4 OUR HEALTH

A LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER HEALTH NEWSLETTER

WHAT DOES SAFER SEX MEAN FOR LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL WOMEN?

By Elliot Long

While there is plenty of information about safer sex out there, very little is directed at or applicable to lesbian and bisexual women. However, that doesn't mean that woman-to-woman sex is always safe. As can be seen from this issue's *STI Expose*, these women are still at risk for many STIs. How do women go about protecting themselves?

Any sexual contact that involves fluids is risky, so one of the most important aspects of safer sex between two women is to always use a barrier of some sort. Dental dams or non-microwaveable plastic wrap both work as great barriers for oral sex. However, it is best to avoid oral sex on a menstruating woman since blood is a very high-risk body fluid.

It is also safer to use condoms when using sex toys, especially if the toys are being shared. Always be sure to use a fresh condom when the toy is being used by more than one person, or it defeats the purpose of using it in the first place.

Also, HIV is still a risk, albeit lower than in the general population, for women who have sex exclusively with women; HIV **can** be spread by woman-to-woman sex. Things that may affect this risk include the fact that some women that have sex with women also have unsafe sex with men; also, some women inject drugs and share needles.

These are important factors to consider with sexual partners.

Thus, two of the most important aspects of safer sex is open communication and honesty. It is vital to be honest with each other about sexual and drug histories, including past partners' histories.

Through the use of barriers, being careful about sharing toys, and healthy communication, women can better protect themselves from many Sexually Transmitted Infections.



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LOCAL PLANNED PARENTHOOD OFFERS HIV TESTING

By Kate Huebner, Planned Parenthood

Close to 16,000 people are infected with HIV every day—that's more than 10 every minute.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that between 850,000 and 900,000 Americans are infected with HIV. Of those persons, 200,000 Americans are not aware of their HIV positive status and may continue to put themselves and others at risk. What's more, at least half of the people being infected with HIV are under 25.

In 1995, the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) selected June 27 as National HIV Testing Day. The campaign slogan in 1995 was "Take the Test. Take Control." This campaign slogan has proven effective, and NAPWA continues to reach out to social service agencies across the country to "get the word out." Since 2003, Planned Parenthood of Southeast Ohio has partnered with NAPWA to educate area residents on the importance of knowing one's HIV status.

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STI EXPOSE: BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS & TRICHOMONIASIS

Editor's Note: STI EXPOSE will appear in following issues covering different Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) each time.

By Melissa Eaton

Many people seem to believe that there is less of a chance of contracting STIs from sexual activity between lesbians; however, this is false. Though STIs are more commonly found in women who have had previous heterosexual partners, it is estimated that only 8-20% of lesbians have had exclusively same-sex partners.

Some STIs specific to lesbians include Anogenital Warts, Bacterial Vaginosis, Yeast Infections, Chlamydia, Genital Herpes, Hepatitis B and C, HIV, and Trichomoniasis. Of these, Bacterial Vaginosis and Trichomoniasis are the most common infections found involving sex between women.

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

BV accounts for over 60% of all vaginal infections and is most common in young sexually active women. This STI is extremely under-diagnosed due to women thinking that they have a yeast infection and treating it with over-the-counter medication. BV occurs when there is an overgrowth of bacteria in the vagina.

Symptoms of BV include a fishy odor, itching, and irritation that may be particularly noticeable after intercourse or

menstruation. Also, a smooth, sticky white or gray discharge may follow 4 days to 4 weeks following sex. If left untreated, BV can lead to Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, infertility, and premature or low birth weight in infants in pregnancies with infected mothers.

Trichomoniasis ("Trich")

Trich has an estimated 5 million new cases each year and has a far higher rate in women than men. 10% of women who seek treatment for STIs are diagnosed with Trich.

Trich is a parasite infection of the vagina and the cervix. This STI can be spread through finger-vaginal penetration and through the sharing of sex toys.

Infection symptoms include a yellow-green or gray vaginal discharge, sometimes bleeding, an unpleasant odor, and itching with discomfort; these may appear 4 to 20 days after becoming infected. Painful and frequent urination, vaginal swelling, discomfort during sex, and abdominal pain may also occur.

If left untreated, Trich has been linked to an increased risk for HIV infection. Infected pregnant women are at risk for premature birth, low birth weight, and infection or rupture of the placenta.

Prevention of these STIs is simple, but it must always be practiced. It is important to be aware of possible STIs and how they are spread.

Woman-to-Woman Sex Risks	
Low-Risk	High-Risk
Nipple and breast stimulation when not lactating	Anything in which there is an exchange of fluids
Using a sex toy with a condom (with a new condom for each person if sharing sex toys)	Sharing sex toys without a condom
Cunnilingus with a barrier	Unprotected cunnilingus, especially when a woman is menstruating
Vaginal or anal contact with a latex glove	Shared hand, finger, and genital contact with cuts or sores
Fisting using a barrier such as a latex glove	Fisting without a barrier such as a glove
Erotic Massage	Unprotected rimming
French Kissing	

Information from "Safe Sex Education for Lesbians": www.lesbianalliance.com.

LOCAL HIV TESTING continued

Planned Parenthood of Southeast Ohio will join agencies across the country to offer **FREE** Anonymous HIV tests to residents in our service area in support of National HIV Testing Day (June 27).

The testing will be held from 9:00 AM-3:00 PM in our Athens Health Service Center at 280 E. State Street. Our agency uses the OraQuick Rapid HIV-1

Test, which is conducted with only a drop of blood from a simple finger stick. Both pre- and post-test counseling are available with test results in 20 minutes.

Those who wish to participate on June 27 must call our agency to schedule an appointment. Arrangements for this special event will be made through the Community Education & Outreach

Department of Planned Parenthood of Southeast Ohio.

Please call 740-593-3375 ext. 232 for more information or to schedule an appointment.

To learn more:

National HIV Testing Day: www.napwa.org
 Planned Parenthood <http://www.ppseo.org>

SURVIVING THE SUMMER WITH FAMILY

By Doug Cloud

Planning your summer at home is a delicate matter that requires finesse, thinking ahead, and a realistic appraisal of how well you get along with your family. It can be difficult to return home and sacrifice the feelings of autonomy and adult community that you have enjoyed at college. Although every situation is different, there are a few tips that can help you gain more control over what kind of summer you will have:

- Plan for employment *before* you arrive home for ten to twelve weeks.
- Make sure that you are within range of friends that you can spend time with.
- If you do not enjoy long stays with your family, consider staying in Athens or, at the very least, plan to visit some friends who are staying.
- Do not expect your friends from high school to be the same people that they were when you left—time changes many things.

“It isn’t easy to leave your college life behind for the summer, but remember: it will be waiting for you when you return.”

- Summer can be a great time to recharge your batteries. Even if you need to make money for school, consider freeing up a few days before the start of school and treating yourself to a mini-vacation.

There is no simple way to deal with family over the summer, but there are a few blanket observations that I can make from my own experience and the experiences of my friends. Although I love my family, spending an entire summer with them was not easy. I have found that the tension was lessened when I

made plans to spend time away from them. Work was hard, but staying at home doing nothing would have been much harder. A healthy social life also helped to make things more bearable and probably made me a more bearable person to be around. It isn’t easy to leave your college life behind for the summer, but remember: it will be waiting for you when you return.



SUMMER SKINCARE A MUST

By Megan Snow

Summer is on her way; one glance around any of the Greens can tell you that. Suddenly, anything that is possible to do outside is done outside—reading for class, sprawled out in the grass



with the warm kiss of the sun on your shoulders... Life could not get any sweeter, right? Well, pardon me for sounding like your mother, but did you put on any sunscreen?

In the United States in 2004 alone, there were 59,350 new cases of skin cancer (Cancer Facts and Figures, American Cancer Society, 2004). The silly thing is that, for the most part, this can be avoided with a short trip to the drug store. Tomorrow, before you decide to sit on College Green to do that Sociology reading, pick up some sun block with a minimum SPF 15 and some SPF 15 lip balm first. Remember that your face is more sensitive, so you may need a higher SPF for your face.

Additionally, UV rays can damage your hair, making it dry and brittle. No, it’s not life threatening, but it is certainly a concern. To avoid this, there exists spray-on sun block for your hair and leave-in conditioners that contain sun block, but check to make sure they have an SPF rating.

Other advice? Carry around some water with you at all times; dehydration and sun stroke are not laughing matters. And while they may seem refreshing, soda, alcohol, and tea will actually increase dehydration. So, when sitting in the summer rays, remember to drink lots of water.

Visit us on the web at
<http://www.ohiou.edu/lgbt>



OHIO
UNIVERSITY

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
Programs Center
314 Baker University Center
Phone: 740.593-0239
Email: lgbt@ohio.edu

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Editor: Elliot Long

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MISSION

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Programs Center, as an integral part of the university community and the Division of Student Affairs advances the mission of Ohio University by serving people of all sexual orientations and gender identities as individuals and as groups. We are committed to fostering human development and cultivating an inclusive, open, and supportive community through education, support, student engagement, collaboration, and advocacy at Ohio University and beyond.

4 O U R H E A L T H ~ 4 Y O U R L I F E T I M E

HUDSON HEALTH CENTER

Student Health Services 593-4730

Counseling & Psychological Services 593-1616

Health Education & Wellness 593-4742

THANKS FOR PICKING US UP, NOW KEEP IN TOUCH!

We hope you like this issue of **4 OUR Health!** Please write us and let us know what you think and what you want to see more or less of. Remember this resource is here to provide for your needs and concerns while adhering to the mission of the LGBT Center and the most current information available to us. We want to make sure that you are given the best information and facts so that you can make informed and sound decisions concerning your life and your health.

If we are not providing what you need, we want to know about it. And if we are providing what you need, we want to know about it. Any way it goes, we would really appreciate your input and ideas. We can be reached by telephone at (740)593-0239 or by email at lgbt@ohio.edu.