
WOMEN LOVIN'



**A SEXUAL HEALTH GUIDE
FOR QUEER WOMEN**

LOVE. LUST. VAGINAL.
PLEASURE. LOVIN'.
DILDOS. HOT.
FUN. PLAY. ORGASM.
SEXY. ORAL.
ANAL. FINGERS.
SPANKING.
CHOICES. DIRTY TALK.
GETTIN' DOWN.
GROUP SEX. ROUGH.
MASTURBATION.
BONDAGE. GENTLE.
FIRST DATES.
LIFE PARTNERS.
CUDDLING.
FISTING. LOVE. LUST.
MAKING OUT.
VAGINAL. DILDOS.
HOT. FUN. PLAY.

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*cisgender (or cis) refers to a person whose biological sex and gender assignment at birth matches their gender identity

INTRO

Women lovin' women are a diverse group. We are of different ages and come from different places. Some of us are poor and some of us are rich. Some of us are trans and some of us are cis*. Some of us smoke, some of us use drugs, some of us are vegan and some of us love our red meat. Some of us only sleep with women and some of us are also into bois, trans guys and dudes. We might have a single partner at a time or we might see multiple people. We might call ourselves queer, femme, butch, lesbian, bisexual, trans, pansexual or genderqueer. We might reject labels because labels can be tricky for some of us and mean different things to different people.

For the purposes of this resource, we will use the term 'queer women' to refer to women who have sex with other women (always, sometimes or maybe once in a while). This resource has been written primarily for cis-gendered queer women and includes information about trans women, cis women, trans men and cis men, in the context of being potential partners to cis women.

A lot of folks think that women who have sex with women don't get sexually transmitted infections (STIs). That's not true! Anybody who is sexually active is potentially exposed to STIs, including HIV, and women can in fact transmit STIs to one another. Although statistics don't reveal the number of

HIV-positive (poz) queer women who have sex with women, we know that many exist. Many queer women have also had sex with a cis man at some point. This exposes queer women and their partners to STIs as well.

By empowering ourselves around our sexual health, we can take better care of ourselves. We can make informed decisions to have sex that's hot and pleasurable, while making choices to keep our partners and ourselves healthy.

This resource is a pocket guide on HIV awareness and prevention for us, queer women. As HIV rates among women continue to grow, it's important that we take care of our health.

HIV

(Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

THE VIRUS IS ONLY FOUND IN FIVE BODY FLUIDS OF SOMEONE WHO IS POZ. THESE ARE:

BLOOD

VAGINAL FLUIDS

SEMEN (including pre-ejaculate or pre-cum)

ANAL FLUIDS

BREAST MILK

HIV BASICS

HIV can only be passed if one of these fluids from someone who is poz reaches the blood stream of another person

HIV cannot pass through unbroken skin. However, it can pass through mucosal membranes, which are the moist linings of body cavities, such as the vagina, urethra (pee hole) and rectum. Having another sexually transmitted infection like herpes, HPV, trichomoniasis, bacterial vaginosis or chlamydia can make it even easier to transmit (or be infected by) HIV. Lack of lubrication, as well as rough sex, can lead to small tears to the vaginal tissue. This can also increase our risk for HIV infection.

HIV weakens our immune system by affecting CD4 white blood cells. The virus attaches itself to these blood cells and then begins to reproduce itself. Over time, especially without HIV medication, our immune system begins to weaken and we become more susceptible to infections and get sick more often (and for longer periods of time). This can sometimes lead to an Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) diagnosis.

HIV SYMPTOMS

HIV often has no obvious symptoms. However, some poz women may experience chronic yeast infections, fatigue, nausea, irregular or heavy periods and abnormal pap or cervical tests. The only way to know if you are poz is through an HIV test.

After HIV enters the body, it may take some time before the test can detect antibodies to the virus (this is known as the window period). Different HIV tests have different window periods. Speak to a healthcare provider about getting tested for HIV as well as other STIs and hepatitis C. If you are looking to be tested for HIV, look for a place that offers numerous testing options, including, if possible, anonymous testing (in which case no one will ask for your name or health card number) and pre- and post-test counselling/education. The back panel of this resource has some information on where you can get tested.

A NOTE ABOUT CONDOMS

Throughout this resource, you will find references to condoms and condom use. Condoms are the most effective way to prevent the majority of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

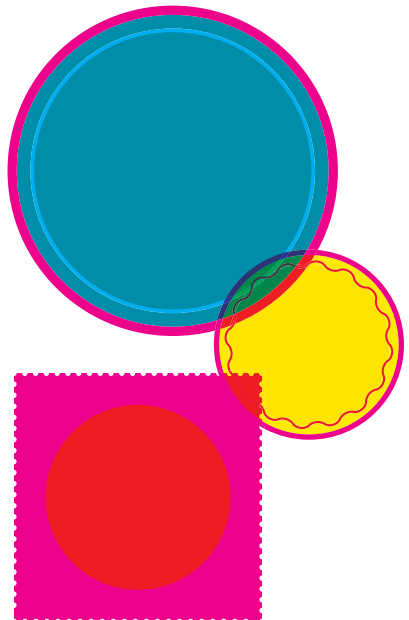
Condoms can be worn externally (i.e. the more common “male condom”). These are usually made of latex, although they can also be made of polyurethane for people with latex sensitivity. We will refer to condoms that are designed to be worn on the penis or on dildos as “external condoms.”

Some condoms are designed to be worn internally (i.e. the “female condom”). These are usually made of polyurethane or synthetic nitrile. We will refer to condoms that are designed to be worn inside the vagina (or sometimes the anus) as “insertive condoms.”

Insertive condoms can be inserted up to eight hours before sex. For some people, they can even increase the pleasure of the receptive partner by reducing internal friction. Insertive condoms are usually more expensive to buy than external condoms, however some organizations give them out at no cost. Check with your local sexual health clinic for availability.

It is important to remember that external and insertive condoms should not be worn together as this may break the condoms.

Avoid condoms with the spermicide nonoxynol-9, which may cause vaginal irritation, increasing HIV risk.



A NOTE ABOUT LUBE

Lots and lots of lubricant, or lube, is generally a really good thing to keep hookups hot and feeling great. Dry sex can hurt and can also cause microscopic tears in our and our partners' tissue, which increases the risk of STI transmission (including HIV). Lube reduces chafing and friction and makes intercourse feel more pleasurable by helping play go on for longer and with more intensity if desired.

There are many brands of lube available. Lube can be water-based, silicone-based and sometimes even oil-based. Different types of lube can feel quite different from each other and some are better for most women's health than others. It's a good idea to try out many types of lube until you find one that works well for you and your partner(s). If you know you have sensitivities to particular products, take some time to look at the ingredients on the packaging before using a new type of lube.

We suggest avoiding flavoured or scented lube, as both the sugars in flavoured lube and the scents can irritate your or your partner/date's tissue, making it easier for STIs (including HIV) transmission.

Many women also find glycerine, found in most lubricants, sugary and able to cause different levels

of irritation and yeast infections. If you are one of these women, try using a lube that is glycerine free.

It is important not to use oil-based lubricants with latex condoms, as oils can damage latex (even oil-based lip balms have the potential to break down latex condoms!).

Many people prefer using silicone-based lube for anal sex, as it is thicker and slicker than most water-based lube. However, it is important to keep silicone-based lube from making contact with any of your silicone-based sex toys, as this can break down your toy!

For a lot of women, unflavoured, unscented water-based lube without glycerine is the least likely to cause irritation.

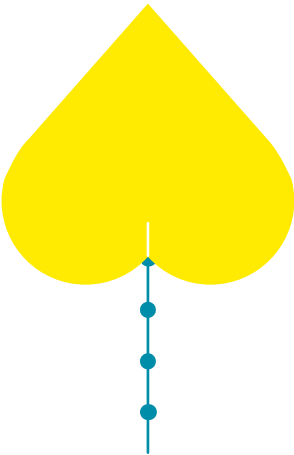
SEX TOYS

Sex toys are an important part of sexual play for many of us. Sharing sex toys can mean sharing vaginal or anal fluids or even blood. This can be a high-risk activity for HIV, Hep C and other STI transmission.



KNOW YOUR RISKS

- Friction from sex toys can cause tearing inside your vagina and anus, making it easier for HIV to pass through your vaginal and anal tissues.
- It is important to note that the Hepatitis C virus (Hep C) is strong and it may not be possible to clean Hep C off of sex toys. For more information on sex toys and Hep C, please see page 28.
- Women who have sex with women are generally at low risk for contracting the bacterial STIs gonorrhea and chlamydia. However, if a woman has been infected with either of these STIs (usually via sex with a man), she can pass it on easily to her female partner through sharing sex toys.



KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Avoid sharing sex toys and keep your sex toys separate. If possible, have a set of toys to be used on you and another set to be used on your partner. If a toy is to be shared, use a new condom on the toy for each partner to ensure that sexual fluids or blood are not being exchanged.
- When using a double-headed dildo, try using different coloured condoms on each end to keep track of who gets which end.
- Another option is for each woman to wear an insertive condom to create a barrier between the sex toy and the mucous membrane of her vagina.
- Use lots of water-based lube to reduce friction. Do not use silicone-based lube if you are using silicone sex toys, as the lube can break down the sex toy. Silicone lube, which many folks find especially good for anal sex, can be used with toys that are not made of silicone.
- Avoid inserting anything with sugars or heavy scents into your vagina, as they can also cause irritation and increase your risk for HIV/STIs. If using lube, stick to unflavoured, unscented water-based lube. It's better for your health, condom health and your sex toys.

DOIN' IT

HOOKING UP IS HOT! EVERY BODY IS DIFFERENT AND EVERY BODY RESPONDS TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF STIMULATION IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

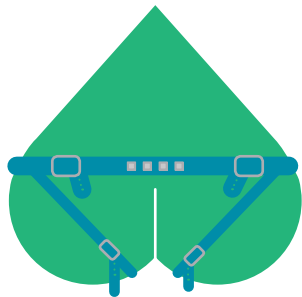
Consent, respect and open communication with your partner or date about what you both like is important to keep things fun for everybody—when in doubt, ask! If you or your partner/date is uncomfortable or unsure about something, slow it down and check in—sometimes all it takes is a few whispered words—and when or if you are both ready, continue with your steamy session!

DOIN' CIS LADIES

Whether you're a queer woman who has just started to have sex with cis women and are super excited (and maybe a little unsure), or have loved having sex with cis women for years, good and respectful communication is the secret to all great and safer sex. What turns on one woman may not work at all for another, and it's up to you and your partner/date to figure out together what works for the two of you. Communicate your likes, dislikes and boundaries with your date or partner and encourage your partner/date to do the same.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

- Our risk for STIs—including HIV/AIDS—has everything to do with what we do, not who we are. HIV transmission between queer cis women is possible, so it's important to keep ourselves informed on what puts us and our partners at risk, as well as how we can have safer and pleasurable sex.
- For those of us who already have another STI (or Hep C): the presence of another STI can increase our chances of being infected by or transmitting HIV.
- For those of us who use drugs: HIV and Hep C are transmitted easily through shared needles, shared equipment, shared straws/bills, shared crack pipes or any "works" we use when using our drug.
- For those of us who are poz: keeping ourselves healthy and our partners healthy is important. We can be reinfected with another (more dangerous) strain of HIV even after we're already poz. If we are currently on treatment for our HIV, being reinfected (also known as superinfection) can interfere with the meds that we are taking. It makes treatment more difficult.



KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Avoid sharing sex toys (including vibrators). External (“male”) condoms can go on dildos/vibrators or insertive (“female”) condoms can be worn inside the vagina or, if you pull out the ring, inside the anus.
- Use a latex barrier like a dental dam or a non-lubricated condom (cut or torn lengthwise) for oral sex, especially if you or your partner have or suspect an herpes outbreak, or if either of you feel any burning or itching in your genitals.
- Get your bits checked out regularly for STIs. Annual and regular check-ups are important, and you can ask your doctor for STI tests then if you are comfortable. Otherwise, visit a sexual health centre in your area—look online for one that’s close to you. If you have a cervix,

get an annual pap and cervical test. Cervical cancer is primarily caused by certain types of HPV, which is an STI.

- Do not douche (i.e. wash out the inside of your vagina with water or any solution). It’s not a good idea! Douching can disrupt your tissue and membrane’s natural balance and cause them to become irritated, resulting in microscopic tears that put you at higher risk for HIV and other STIs. Vaginas are self-cleaning. However, vulvas can be cleaned with warm water and a mild soap.
- Keeping your nails short can also help you reduce the risk of tearing the vaginal/anal walls of your partner. Also, please note nail polish can flake off inside.

DOIN’ TRANS WOMEN

Queer trans women have particular needs and experiences that are different than those of queer cis women. Hooking up between a trans woman and a cis woman may be intimidating for both women at first. But in any hook-up situation, what is important is consent, as well as open and respectful communication.

If you are a cis woman and are having sex with someone who is a trans woman for the first time, she may have different genitals than you were expecting. Some trans women have had lower/bottom surgery, while some have not. We all have complex relationships with our bodies. Be respectful of your partner; it is best to ask her how she would like you to refer to her bits. It's also important to ask your partner or date how she likes to be stimulated, what parts of her body she enjoys having touched and what parts of her body she would perhaps like you to leave alone. If your partner is taking hormones, she might notice a change in what gets her off now as compared to what used to make her hot before she started taking them.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

- Trans women who have not had lower/bottom surgery, but who are on hormones, may find that sustaining an erection isn't as easy as it was before they started on hormones. This can cause external condoms to slip off more easily.
- Trans women who have had lower surgery may find that it is not always easy to lubricate (become wet). Because dry genitals result in more friction, this can lead to a decrease in pleasure and result in microscopic tears, increasing the risk of transmission of HIV and other STIs.

- It's important to remember that a trans woman who has not had lower surgery may be able to get her cis female partner pregnant if they are having condomless sex.

- Condomless sex involving a penis can be particularly high risk for HIV transmission, since the virus is found in the semen (and possibly the pre-ejaculate or pre-cum) of someone who is poz.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- If your partner is using an external condom, take care to frequently check that the condom is in place. Another option is for the cis partner to wear an insertive condom instead.
- More lube! Lots of water-based lube will keep the sex you are having hot and feeling good for both partners. This will reduce the risk of transmission of STIs and HIV, and also reduce the number of microscopic tears.
- Try a few different types of lube to see what helps increase pleasure for each of you!
- It is especially important to use gloves, dental dams and condoms (and lots of lube!) to reduce the risk of tearing or injuring the genitals of your trans partner during sex, as her tissue might be more fragile than yours.

DOIN' TRANS GUYS

Consent, respect and open communication are key to hot sex. If you are hooking up with a trans dude, you may find that he has had top or lower/bottom surgery, or neither. Getting with a trans guy who's into women may be a new experience and you may find that his genitalia are not what you were expecting. You may call your genitals your vagina, vulva, clit, etc., but he may have different names for his.

Be respectful of your partner or date—ask him what names he prefers for his bits, and ask if there are places he likes to be stimulated and places he'd rather you not touch. Follow his lead and also allow for the communications of your own likes and dislikes!

Remember that if your partner or date is a queer trans man who also sleeps with cis guys, it may be possible for him to become pregnant.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

Unprotected sex and the sharing of sex toys are high risks for transmitting STIs, including HIV.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

Use insertive or external condoms (not both together!) as well as latex or nitrile gloves and dental dams for hot safer sex. Use lots of water-based lube to make sex feel even better and to reduce microscopic tears in your and your partner's genitalia/anus.



DOIN' CIS DUDES

Many queer women have or have had sex with cis-gendered men at some time. Some of us may even have primary or regular cis male partners. Having sex with cis men can expose us to particular types of STIs.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

- Most women who are poz have been infected through unprotected vaginal or anal sex with cis guys.
- HIV is transmitted far more easily from poz cis guys to women through unprotected sex than from poz cis women to guys.
- You can also get—or pass on—other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) from unprotected vaginal or anal sex. Gonorrhea and chlamydia are two bacterial STIs that are pretty common to women who have sex with men. Often those with a cervix do not display symptoms of these infections (although some might experience irritation and unusual discharge), so regular STI tests are a good idea. Both gonorrhea and chlamydia can be treated with antibiotics. For more information on these STIs, check out the STIs section on page 29.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Use condoms (external or insertive) and lots of unflavoured/unscented water-based lube if/when having sex with a dude, even if you're on the pill or use another form of contraception.
- Use a lot of lube to avoid microscopic vaginal and anal tearing. Tearing can make it easier to get or pass on HIV and other STIs.



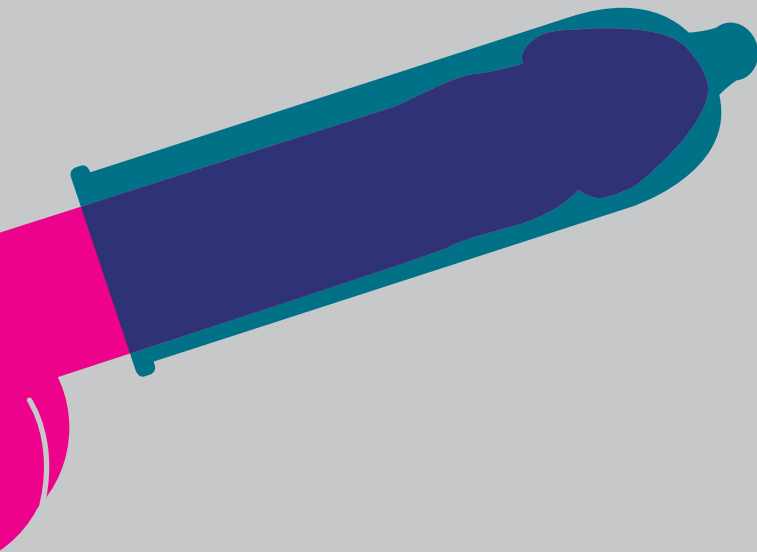
UNPROTECTED VAGINAL OR ANAL SEX WITH A CIS DUDE

KNOW YOUR RISKS

The friction from penetration can cause tiny cuts and scrapes inside your vagina and anus, allowing semen (cum) access to your bloodstream. This is high risk for HIV infection if he is poz or isn't aware of his HIV status.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

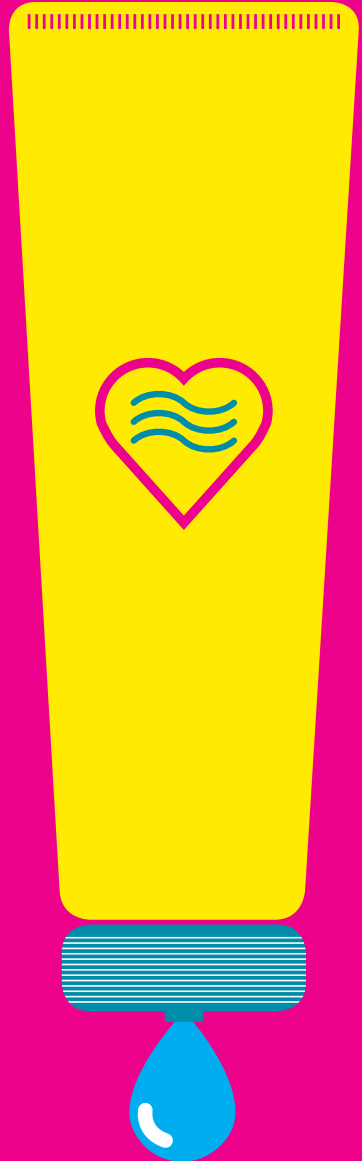
- Use a lubricated latex condom for vaginal and anal sex. Avoid condoms with the spermicide nonoxynol-9, which may cause vaginal and anal irritation, increasing HIV risk.
- Use a lot of lubrication to increase pleasure and reduce the chances of tearing your vaginal lining and anal tissue.
- You can use an insertive polyurethane or nitrile condom instead of an external condom.



OLDER LADIES

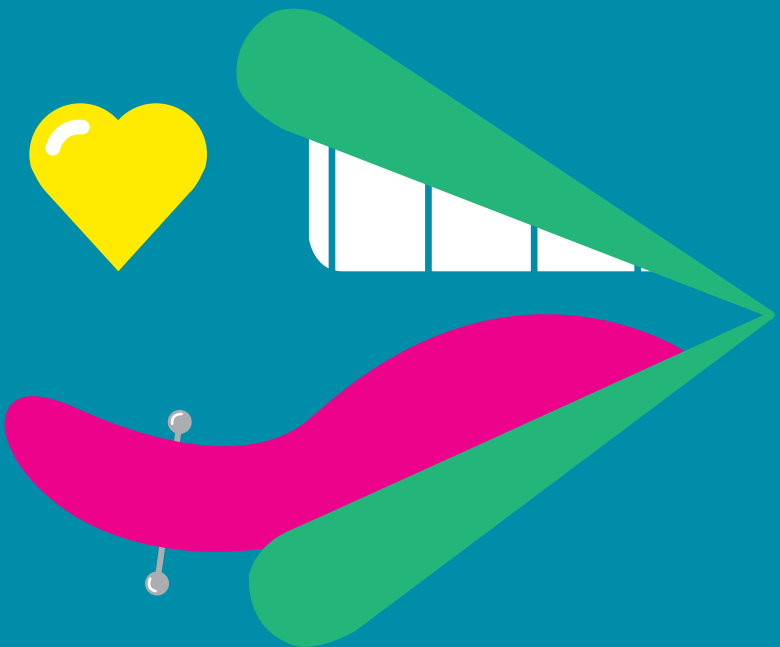
For those of us who have already experienced menopause or have lower levels of estrogen: vaginal atrophy (the thinning and inflammation of the vaginal walls, often linked to low levels of estrogen) can increase the chances of HIV infection.

Using lots of water-based lube is a great way to reduce HIV transmission and make sex more pleasurable. A vagina can be dry or become dry due to changes in hormone levels during menopause, because of vigorous sex, or for other biological reasons. A dry vagina is at greater risk for tiny tears from penetrative sex that can make HIV transmission easier. Have your favourite lube around to keep sex with your partner feeling good and your vaginas wet and happy. Many women have sensitivities or allergies to the sugars and scents in flavoured lube (which can irritate the vagina—not good!) so we suggest sticking with unflavoured lube.



ORAL

Oral sex feels amazing for a lot of people. Once again, communication is key—if you're giving it, watch and listen for signs from your partner or date! They should give you a good idea as to whether you should keep doing what you are doing, change it up or speed it up/slow it down. If you are receiving it, communicate what you want to your partner to keep it hot and fun for both of you.

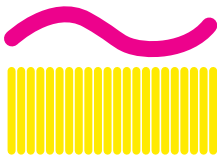


KNOW YOUR RISKS

- Oral sex is considered low risk for HIV—not many people get HIV from oral sex. But, going down with cuts or sores in your mouth, or with bleeding gums, increases your HIV risk. Sometimes, we don't notice or we forget about cuts caused by eating hard foods, dental work or biting our tongues.
- Other STIs, such as herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, etc., can be passed on quite easily through oral sex. Having another STI makes it easier to pass on or be infected by HIV.
- Giving oral sex to someone who is on their period can increase the chances of HIV transmission because of the increased presence of blood.
- Remember that anything that can live on genitals can be contracted in the mouth!

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Avoid oral sex after dental work.
- Wait between 30 minutes and two hours after brushing or flossing your teeth.
- Cover your partner's vagina with a dental dam; cut off the tip of a condom and cut it up the side; or cut the fingers off of a latex glove. You can also use plastic wrap (non-microwavable, so that it doesn't have holes).
- Use a condom if you're going down on a penis—try flavoured condoms!
- Use a bit of lube under the dental dam, on the genitals of the person receiving oral sex, to increase pleasure, as well as to help keep the dam in place. Lube can also be used on the tip of a penis, under the condom, to do the same. It not only feels better, but it decreases the chance of a barrier breaking!



BDSM

(Bondage Discipline Sadism Masochism)

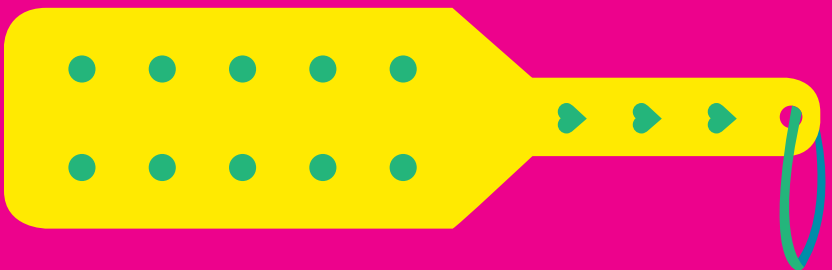
A lot of us are into hot power play with our partner(s)/ date(s). BDSM is an umbrella term that covers different kinds of consensual and communicated kinky pleasure play, including dominance, control and submission, bondage, corporal punishment and role playing.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

Most BDSM activities are low risk for HIV if there is no exchange of sexual fluids or blood. However, you can be at risk for HIV and other STIs if sexual fluids or blood are exchanged. BDSM includes almost endless possibilities and sometimes-complex erotic activity that may or may not involve sexual acts or the breaking of skin. BDSM activities that involve piercing, scarification or branding are riskier for HIV and Hep C transmission because they involve breaking the skin, but they too can be done in a safer way. Find out more about the way to have safe, hot and consensual BDSM.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Use barriers for fingering and fisting.
- Avoid sharing sex toys and tools.
- Barriers and condoms should only be used once, with each date/partner.
- Latex clothing, leather harnesses and any materials used should be properly cleaned between each partner/person.
- People who love their BDSM safe, hot and sexual can pick up BDSM: Safer Kinky Sex through CATIE, or refer to the online version at actoronto.org/bdsm.



FINGERIN' & FISTIN'

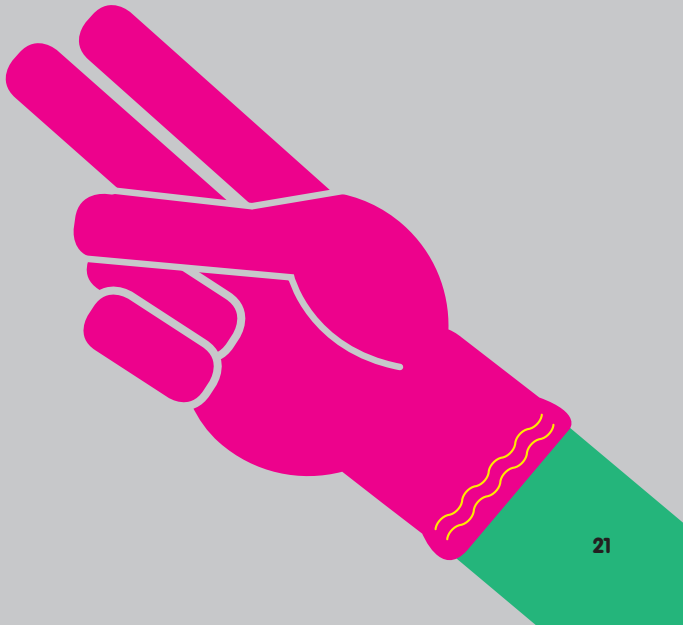
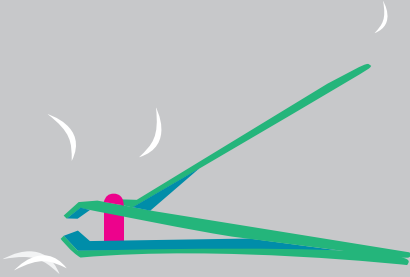
(inserting fingers or entire hand in partner's vagina or ass)

KNOW YOUR RISKS

Cuts and sores on your fingers or hands can allow access to your bloodstream. Also, the friction from penetration can cause vaginal and anal tearing in your partner.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- If fisting is new to you or your partner/date, start slow and check in with each other frequently to make sure that what is happening feels good to both of you.
- Use latex or nitrile gloves (available in most pharmacies) with plenty of water-based lube for fingering and fisting. Medical gloves are available in several materials, including latex, vinyl and nitrile. Try them out to see which ones you like best and try coloured gloves to make it sexier!
- Keep your nails short to avoid injuring yourself or your partner/date. Cotton balls can be placed on longer nails before inserting into a glove to help cushion the nails, but additional care must be taken.



GETTIN' PREGNANT

Pregnancy is something that some of us choose, either as single women, with (a) partner(s), or as a part of a larger community. The possibilities of how and why and when we have children are many and deeply personal. A few women choose sperm banks. Some women choose to carry their partner's fertilized eggs, some might choose to have sex with a friend who is willing to donate their sperm, and others might choose self-insemination (injecting semen into our vaginas) from a donor. Inseminating semen without testing for HIV increases our risk of infection.

As queer women (both trans and cis), it's also likely that we have faced discrimination in the health-care system, or have encountered healthcare practitioners who don't seem to know a lot about our particular needs and issues. This is frustrating and can be discouraging. However, it is important to speak up and ask questions to take care of our health and that of those we love. If we become pregnant, it can be especially challenging to be in a medical system that sometimes feels like it is set up for heterosexual couples. If you are not comfortable or satisfied with your doctor or service provider, speak to your local LGBT resource centre to see if they have recommendations for queer-friendly healthcare practitioners.

It is also important to continue to be tested for HIV at each trimester, especially if you or your sexual partner(s) become sexually active with other people. Getting tested in your third trimester is crucial in order to prevent vertical (pregnant person-to-fetus) transmission.

It is important to remember that not everybody who is able to become pregnant is woman-identified. Many trans men or other masculine-identified folks can—and do—become pregnant. Families, whether biological or chosen, can look very different from each other. Transphobia and homophobia means that trans parents and queer parents can face many challenges in accessing healthcare and resources, but there are supportive community resources available!

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- If you prefer an anonymous sperm donor, make sure to use a licensed sperm bank.

- To reduce the risk of HIV infection, ensure the donor has had two HIV antibody tests six months apart, with the first test six months after his last possible exposure to HIV. If the donor is poz, there can be a high risk of HIV transmission from his semen, though there is the option of “sperm washing*”.

- If you choose to get pregnant by having sex with someone who is poz, it is not advisable to have unprotected sex (even if you are poz too) without consulting an HIV specialist, as both or one of you can become reinfected with another type or strain of HIV. An HIV specialist may be able to reduce your partner’s viral load (the amount of HIV present in the blood) enough to allow you to have unprotected sex without a significant risk of HIV transmission.

***There is a process called “sperm washing” available, which washes away HIV-positive semen from sperm. Sperm washing is quite expensive and unfortunately many fertility clinics are not yet supportive of poz folks. For more information on sperm washing, speak to an HIV specialist with whom you are comfortable.**

- If you are poz, you should know that you have the same rights to have children as anybody else. If you decide to become pregnant, ask to be referred to a midwife or gynecologist with experience in working with people who are HIV-positive, if possible. With your consent, you should be put on antiretroviral (anti-HIV) medication to reduce the risk of HIV transmission to your fetus. Once your child is born, your child will be put on antiretrovirals for a period of time as well. The success rate of antiretrovirals has been great; it reduces vertical (pregnant parent-to-child) transmission risk from 25 percent to less than two percent!

- HIV is found in breast milk. In Canada, HIV-positive women should use formula, instead of breastfeeding their infants. This is often provided free by birth clinics.

- Some of us get pregnant without planning it. It is important to remember that trans women who have not had lower or bottom surgery can potentially get their non-trans female sexual partner pregnant. An unplanned pregnancy can bring up many emotions and many questions. You have options! If you decide to have an abortion, you may or may not feel some complex emotions. Talking to someone you feel safe with, such as a friend or a counsellor, might be a good idea.

SUBSTANCES

Getting drunk or high can affect our decision-making around safer sex and our ability to communicate consent. This is important to keep in mind when we are partying.

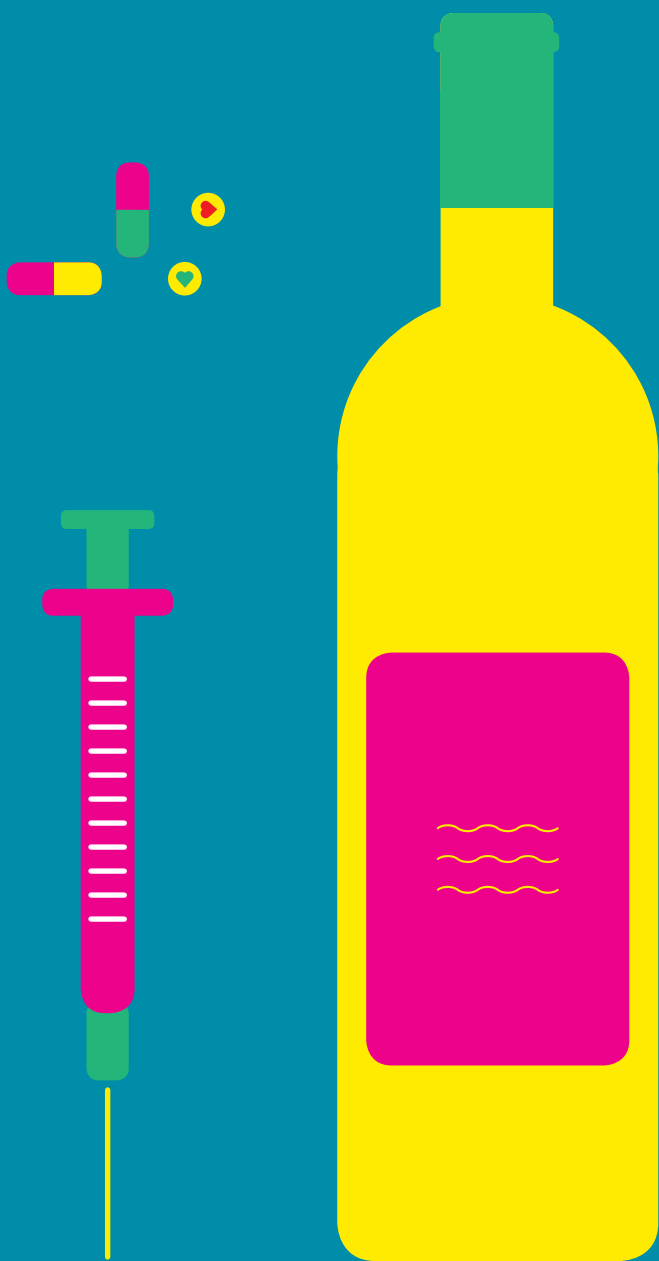
KNOW YOUR RISKS

Sharing needles is a very easy way to get or pass on HIV, Hep C and many other germs. HIV and Hep C can survive in needles and works and enter into your bloodstream. If you smoke crack cocaine, your lips can crack or burn from the pipe, creating an opportunity for HIV or Hep C infection if you share pipes. If you use straws, roll paper or money to snort drugs, and share these, you can also get or pass on HIV, Hep C and other germs.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Avoid sharing needles and pipes. This includes drug-injecting equipment or “works” for all injectables, such as steroids/hormones or insulin.
- If you cannot use a new needle every time, clean needles by filling the syringe with water and shaking for at least 30 seconds. Repeat with bleach, and then do it again with water to rinse. Note that cleaning with bleach does not kill Hep C.

- Wrap tissue, a rubber band or duct tape around the end of your pipe (on the mouthpiece)—or even add a dab of nail polish—to mark your own.
- Keep your lips moist with lip balms, but remember that lip balms can break down condoms and barriers if you plan to have any kind of oral sex before/after using.
- Use your own straw if you snort drugs. Preferably, use a straw once and throw it away. Do not use a rolled up bill or share straws!
- Avoid getting too drunk and high with people you don't know. Passing out may put you at risk for sexual assault. If you can, stay with a friend who knows how you use and can communicate with you if you become too intoxicated.
- Even if you and your partner(s) are poz, practicing safer sex and safer drug-use practice will reduce the chance of reinfecting yourselves with another strain of HIV (known as superinfection). Multiple HIV infections can make treatment more difficult and symptoms more severe.



HEPATITIS

HEPATITIS IS A SWELLING AND INFLAMMATION OF THE LIVER. THERE ARE THREE MAIN TYPES OF HEPATITIS VIRUSES:

HEPATITIS A (Hep A)

Hep A can take one month to experience symptoms and can take up to two months to cure on its own.

SYMPTOMS: light-coloured feces (poop), dark urine (pee), feeling tired, fever, headaches, stomach cramps and jaundice (skin and eyes develop a yellowish colour).

KNOW YOUR RISKS

It is spread through rimming (licking ass), from unwashed hands after a bowel movement, and from contaminated food or water (food or unfiltered water that contains traces of feces/poop).

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Wash hands after bowel movements and using bathrooms.
- Use a dental dam or non-microwavable plastic wrap for rimming.
- Use latex gloves for fingering your partner's ass.
- Avoid going from anus to vagina during activities, such as fisting, rimming and cleaning yourself. This can spread bacteria and lead to vaginal infections.
- Get a Hep A vaccination.

HEPATITIS B (Hep B)

Many people do not experience any symptoms and may be unaware that they have Hep B. Symptoms are like Hep A and can last two to six months after infection. Some people clear the infection and become immune, while others go on to be carriers and are able to give it to others. In some cases of severe Hep B, (ongoing) liver inflammation may lead to long-term difficulties, including cirrhosis and/or liver cancer.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

Hep B is transmitted through unprotected oral, vaginal and anal sexual contact, as well as from sharing syringes containing infected blood. A pregnant person can also pass it on to their child during pregnancy and delivery.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Practice safer oral, vaginal and anal sex (see the previous section).
- Avoid sharing needles and other drug equipment or works. Use new syringes and needles when injecting.
- Avoid sharing razors, toothbrushes, nail files and nail clippers.
- Get a Hep B vaccination.

HEPATITIS C (Hep C)

Many people don't show symptoms of Hep C and may be unaware that they have it. Symptoms are similar to Hep A. If you develop chronic Hep C, this can cause liver damage that will grow worse over time. Although there is no vaccination for Hep C, treatment is very effective.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

- Hep C is transmitted by blood. This can be through the sharing of needles of any kind.
- Hep C may be transmitted through the sharing of infected reusable tattoo needles and non-sterilized body piercing tools.
- Hep C can also be transmitted sexually if there is blood present. A pregnant woman with Hep C is five percent likely to pass Hep C to her baby at birth. However, this risk increases if the pregnant woman is also living with HIV.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Avoid sharing your toothbrush, razor, nail trimmer or file.
- Avoid sharing needles/syringes or other works for injecting drugs.
- Make sure piercing/tattoo equipment is properly sterilized.

SEX TOYS & HEPATITIS VIRUSES

Sex toys (including vibrators) get bodily fluids, such as vaginal secretions, fecal matter or even blood on them. All of these fluids can carry hepatitis viruses. Cleaning or killing hepatitis viruses on objects such as sex toys is difficult, and can even be impossible.

Regularly available cleaners (including bleach) and hospital-grade cleaners may not work to kill hepatitis on sex toys and other intimate sexual objects, so it is suggested not to share your sex toys. Even though there are cleaners that indicate they will kill hepatitis viruses on surfaces, it is not known what effect these cleaners will have on the

different materials used to make sex toys. However, for some women, sharing sex toys can be hot. An option to make sharing safer is to use a new external condom each time a sex toy is used on a different person during play. Another possibility is for each woman to wear an insertive condom to create a barrier between the sex toy and the mucous membrane of her vagina.

STIs

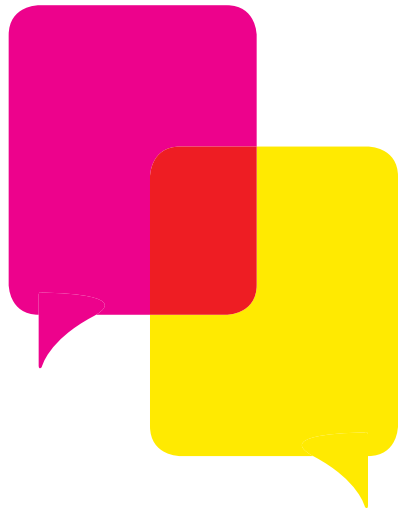
(Sexually Transmitted Infections)

Passing on HIV between women can be made riskier if one or both people have another STIs or infection (including a yeast infection or bacterial vaginosis). Infections cause irritation and tiny cuts to our bits, making it easier for HIV to pass through the skin or mucus membrane. Infections also attract more white blood cells to the site of the infection; because these are the cells that HIV targets, having them so close to the “entry point” means that HIV can be contracted more easily in the body.

For those of us who are poz, it's especially important that we keep an eye on STIs and other infections. STIs can cause “viral shedding” in our vaginal fluid (a higher presence of HIV), and the symptoms and effects of the STIs can progress faster than in those of us who are not poz. HIV can awaken STIs or make worse the complications caused by STIs.

The next few pages talk about some infections that are common to women, especially to women who are into other women. Getting tested regularly for STIs and taking care of vaginal infections is a good way to maintain our health. Using either external or insertive condoms consistently with our partners and having honest and open

communication in our relationships is key to our own health and well-being! It is important for us to take care of our own sexual health first. In doing so, we can more easily and confidently communicate with those we care about.



HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)

HPV is a virus that affects the skin and genital area. There are about 130 types of HPV, and it is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Anyone who has engaged in sexual activity with a partner is at risk for HPV exposure, but only a handful of types are of concern for cervical and anal cancer.

HPV invades the skin and can exist without symptoms for months or years. HPV often causes genital warts, which resemble small lumps, flat plaques or cauliflower-like growths that show up on or in your vagina, anus or mouth. Depending on your skin, the warts can appear pink, red, grey or brown, and are often mistaken for ingrown hairs or beauty marks. Although not usually painful, the warts may cause irritation or itchiness. Treatments don't cure HPV, but removing the warts reduces the risk of transmission.

Most HPV infections clear by themselves. However, there are certain strains of HPV infection that greatly increase our risk for cervical or anal cancer. If you have a cervix, pap tests and cervical checks are a good idea—no matter who you have sex with! Pap tests detect unusual cervical cells that have been transformed or altered because of HPV. Some abnormalities caused by HPV infection can be mild, while others may be more

abnormal and, in some cases, pre-cancerous. This is why it is important to have regular pap tests, so that you and your healthcare provider(s) can monitor and treat abnormal growths before they become tumours. For poz women, cervical and anal cancer tend to be far more common, therefore it is especially important to have regular cervical checks and pap tests. Some queer women will find that their healthcare provider will neglect offering cervical checks or pap tests to them because they have not/are not having sex with cis men. Cervical checks and pap tests are important for anybody who has a cervix, no matter who you have sex with. Self-advocacy can be a powerful tool. Insist on a pap test and cervical check during your regular checkups. If you are unable to convince your healthcare provider, get in touch with a sexual health clinic near you or look for another provider.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

HPV can be transmitted through hand-to-vagina, vagina-to-vagina and mouth-to-vagina contact. It can also be transmitted through direct contact with the warts.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Avoid sharing sex toys.
- Have regular cervical checks for early detection of unusual cervical cells.
- Avoid humping or grinding (vagina-to-vagina rubbing) or place a barrier between you and your partner(s) to avoid contact.

- Use barriers for oral sex.
- Use latex gloves for fisting or fingering.

Currently, there are two HPV vaccines available in Canada. The HPV vaccines (Gardasil and Cervarix) work by preventing two of the most common HPV strains that cause cervical and anal cancers (Gardasil also prevents against two wart-causing strains of HPV). They are most effective when given before first sexual contact (i.e. before a person may be exposed to HPV).

HERPES SIMPLEX 1 & 2

Herpes 1 is usually found around the mouth (cold sores) and is often transmitted to our genitals through oral sex. Genital (vaginal) herpes, or Herpes Simplex 2, is transmitted by scissoring (rubbing vulvas together, humping), as well as through unprotected vaginal, anal and oral sex. Herpes appears as itchy, burning red bumps and water blisters on your breast, thigh, anus, mouth and vagina. Often it is misdiagnosed as a yeast infection, urinary tract infection or cervicitis (swelling of the cervix). Genital herpes sores can develop inside the vagina or cervix and go unnoticed.

KNOW YOUR RISKS

Both Herpes Simplex 1 and 2 are spread by direct skin contact. Hot and wet settings are ideal for transmission.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

- Have oral sex with a latex barrier or non-microwavable plastic wrap.
- Avoid oral sex if there are cold sores on the mouth.

- Use latex gloves with lube for fingering and fisting.
- Avoid sex “humping” during an outbreak.
- Wash your hands after contact with your sores.

OTHER STUFF

Candidiasis (a yeast infection/thrush) is an overgrowth of the candida fungus, causing vaginal itching and soreness, often with a white discharge. It can be brought on by a variety of factors, including a weakened immune system, birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy, antibiotic use, douching, and diets high in sugars or wheat. Poz women can experience recurring, chronic or more severe yeast infections. Candidiasis can be passed via sex between women (through humping, scissoring, fingering, etc.), though oral sex is considered low risk. Treatment can include over-the-counter anti-fungal medication as well as other natural home remedies.

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is an overgrowth of vaginal bacteria, leading to a thin white discharge that can smell “fishy.” It is the most common vaginal infection and is caused by an imbalance of the bacteria usually found in the vagina. Although it is not considered an STI, BV most commonly affects women of a childbearing age, especially those who are pregnant or have another STI. There is a possible link with douching, perfumed soaps and bath oils. BV is treated with antibiotics.

Trichomonas vaginalis (TV) is caused by a parasite and gives a frothy, itchy vaginal discharge. It is passed on by contact with the vagina, for example by touching or sharing sex toys. It is passed on quite easily by vulva-to-vulva contact with an infected partner. TV can increase the risk of cervical cancer or endometriosis. It is treated with single-dose prescription medication.

Crabs/public lice cling to pubic and other body hair where they lay eggs. They cause itching and sometimes blood spots from bites. They are spread through naked body/skin contact, and also sometimes through sharing sheets, towels, etc. They are treated with a wash that can be obtained at most pharmacies.

Chlamydia and **gonorrhea** are rare in queer women unless we have had sex with someone with a penis. Both STIs, if they are present, may be passed on between queer women through the sharing of sex toys or by rubbing vulvas together. Often there are no symptoms, though there may be a discharge. The first sign of both infections may be pain in the pelvic region (pelvic inflammatory disease or PID). Both are treated with antibiotics. Untreated chlamydia can cause infertility.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault is any kind of “sexual” act (it can be visual, verbal or physical) that is non-consensual (that was not agreed to). Physical sexual assault can include being forced to kiss someone, touch someone, be touched, or to have intercourse with someone. Many of us have survived sexual assault in our lives, or know someone who has survived it. Sexual assault is physically, emotionally and psychologically traumatic, and many emotions, fears and concerns can arise after the assault. A concern about contracting STIs, including HIV, is common among survivors, especially if the assault involved unprotected vaginal or anal penetration with a penis, or the exchange of bodily fluids.

Ideally, survivors of sexual assault who are believed to have been exposed to HIV are offered PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) after a post-assault assessment at a sexual assault centre or hospital. PEP is anti-HIV medication that has been shown to be very effective in reducing HIV infection after HIV exposure. PEP treatment must begin within 72 hours after exposure and be taken for 28 consecutive days. The sooner that PEP is taken, the more effective it is.

TO BE PRESCRIBED PEP AFTER A SEXUAL ASSAULT:

- A woman has to report the attack to a sexual assault centre or the police.
- A healthcare professional will assess whether the assault has led to a high risk of exposure to HIV.
- A woman at high risk is offered PEP as part of a sexual assault kit.

PEP is also available for women who are at high risk of exposure through consensual sex. Access and coverage varies across Canada. Check with a local sexual health clinic or emergency department.

RESOURCES

NATIONAL RESOURCES

CATIE

Canada's Source for HIV and Hep C Information.

www.catie.ca

www.hepCinfo.ca

Toll-Free: 1-800-263-1638

(CATIE accepts collect calls from Canadian prisons)

Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition

Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition is a national organization whose objective is to address the various health and wellness issues that people who have sexual and emotional relationships with people of the same gender, or a gender identity that does not conform to the identity assigned to them at birth, encounter.

www.rainbowhealth.ca

Toll Free: 1-800-955-5129

EGALE Canada

EGALE Canada is a national organization committed to advancing equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-identified people, and their families, across Canada.

www.egale.ca

Toll Free: 1-888-204-7777

Options Sexual Health Association

Options Sexual Health Association is a charitable organization that provides sexual health education and counselling services in Edmonton and surrounding communities.

www.optionssexualhealth.ca

780-423-3737

PFLAG Canada

PFLAG Canada is a national organization that helps all Canadians who are struggling with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. PFLAG Canada supports, educates and provides resources to parents, families, friends and colleagues with questions or concerns.

Toll Free: 1-888-530-6777 (English)

Toll Free: 1-888-530-6483 (French)

www.pflagcanada.ca

ORGANIZATIONS & SERVICES IN TORONTO

ANONYMOUS HIV & STI TESTING

AIDS and Sexual Health Hotline Ontario

Toll Free: 1-800-668-2437

Hassle Free Clinic

416-922-0566

Planned Parenthood Toronto

416-961-0113

NEEDLE EXCHANGE

The Works

416-392-0520

QUEER AND/OR TRANS WOMEN'S SUPPORT

519 Church Street Community Centre

416-392-6874

LGBTQ Youth Line

Toll Free: 1-800-268-9688

Sherbourne Health Centre

416-324-4103

LGBTQ COUNSELLING

David Kelly Services – Family Service Association of Toronto

LGBTQ & HIV/AIDS Counselling
www.fsatoronto.com
416-595-9618

Women's Counselling Referral Education Centre (WCREC)

416-534-7501

SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL PLEASURE PRODUCTS AND INFORMATION

Come As You Are

416-504-7934

Good for Her

416-588-0900

Red Tent Sisters

1-866-967-TENT (8368)

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Toronto Rape Crisis Centre

416-597-8808

ORGANIZATIONS & SERVICES IN THE REST OF CANADA

The Avenue Community Centre for Gender and Sexual Identity

Supporting Saskatchewan's
lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,
two-spirit and queer (LGBT2Q)
community.

www.avenuecommunitycentre.ca
Toll free: 1-800-358-1833

Calgary Outlink: Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity

www.calgaryoutlink.ca
403-234-8973

Halifax Sexual Health Centre

www.hshc.ca
780-423-3737

Rainbow Resource Centre

Supporting Manitoba's gay,
lesbian, bisexual, transgender
and two-spirit communities.
www.rainbowresourcecentre.org

QMUNITY

BC's Queer Resource Centre
www.qmunity.ca
604-684-5307

LOVE. LUST. VAGINAL.
PLEASURE. LOVIN'.
DILDOS. HOT.
FUN. PLAY. ORGASM.
SEXY. ORAL.
ANAL. FINGERS.
SPANKING.
CHOICES. DIRTY TALK.
GETTIN' DOWN.
GROUP SEX. ROUGH.
MASTURBATION.
BONDAGE. GENTLE.
FIRST DATES.
LIFE PARTNERS.
CUDDLING.
FISTING. LOVE. LUST.
MAKING OUT.
VAGINAL. DILDOS.
HOT. FUN. PLAY.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

ACT (AIDS Committee of Toronto)
399 Church Street, 4th Floor, Toronto, Ontario M5B 2J6
416-340-2437
ask@actoronto.org
www.actoronto.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HIV AND/OR HEP C

CATIE
www.catie.ca
www.hepCinfo.ca
1-800-263-1638

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