

Health Bulletin:

Women and HIV/AIDS



#24 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

Use condoms to protect yourself and others, and get tested for HIV.



- Early in the epidemic, 10% of New Yorkers with HIV were women. *Today, 1 in 3 is a woman.*
- Most women used to become infected by injecting drugs. *Today, most women are infected by an HIV-positive man.*
- Most New York City women with HIV (almost 90%) are African-American or Hispanic.
- Every woman living with HIV can get good health care, regardless of ability to pay or immigration status. Help is available.

You May Be at Higher Risk Than You Think

- About 1 in 4 New Yorkers with HIV *don't know they're infected*. An HIV test is the only way to know for sure.
- Unprotected heterosexual sex is *riskier for women* than men.
- Unprotected receptive anal sex is very risky for both men and women.
- Some women are at higher risk because their male partners have sex with other men, or use drugs, without telling them.
 - Men on the “down low” don’t usually think of themselves as gay.
 - Gay-identified or not, men who have sex with men are at higher risk than other men of getting and spreading HIV, especially if they don’t use condoms.
- Injection drug users are at very high risk of getting and spreading HIV.

Know Your HIV Status – Get Tested

If you have ever been sexually active, or ever injected drugs (even if only once), get tested for HIV.

If you are HIV-negative:

- Take steps to stay that way (*see page 2*).
- Ask if your partner is infected. If he or she is HIV-positive, or does not know, you can work together to practice safer sex.
- Get tested for sexually transmitted diseases regularly. Having an STD can make it easier to get infected with HIV.

If you are HIV-positive:

- See a doctor who specializes in treating HIV.
 - Medical treatment for HIV can help you feel better and live longer.
 - Call 311 for information on HIV treatment, care, and other services.
- Always practice safer sex, and always tell people you have HIV *before* you have sex with them.
- If you’re pregnant or planning pregnancy, talk to your doctor! HIV medications will improve your health and *greatly* reduce the chance your baby will get infected.



Protect Yourself and Others

- Not having sex and not shooting drugs are the only sure ways to avoid HIV and other STDs.
- If you are sexually active, reduce HIV risk by:
 - Having sex *only* in an exclusive, mutually monogamous relationship with someone you are sure is not infected.
 - Limiting the number of people you have sex with. The more partners, the higher your risk.
 - *Always using latex or polyurethane condoms every time you have sex* – vaginal, anal, or oral.
- Avoid alcohol or drugs when you have sex.
 - Being high makes it much harder to have safer sex.
 - Call 311 for help with an alcohol or drug problem.
- Never share needles or “works”.

Where to Get Tested

- You can get an HIV test from your regular doctor.
- Free, confidential testing and treatment for STDs, including HIV tests with results in less than an hour, are available at STD clinics in all 5 boroughs. Call 311 for information.
- People under age 18 do *not* need parental consent for STD and HIV testing, counseling, or treatment. Women do *not* need consent from a partner.

More Information

- See Health Bulletin #3: “Know Your HIV Status” at nyc.gov/health, or call 311.
- Free help for domestic violence: call 311 and ask for the Domestic Violence Hotline, or call the Hotline directly at 1-800-621-HOPE (1-800-621-4673). You will get help regardless of immigration status. **Call 911 for emergencies.**
- For information about HIV and other STDs, including free, confidential or anonymous counseling and testing, visit nyc.gov/health or call 311.

Take Control – Bring Your Own Condom

- Use only *latex* or *polyurethane* condoms. Other types prevent pregnancy, but don’t protect against HIV.
- Female condoms, which are made of polyurethane and placed in the vagina, also protect against HIV.
- You have a right to insist that your partner uses a condom.
 - Talk about why it’s important to use condoms and practice safer sex.
 - Be prepared – bring your own condom. Don’t depend on someone else.
- No one – including a spouse or intimate partner – has the right to prevent you from using condoms or force you to have sex for any reason.
 - Forced sex, like other forms of domestic violence, is a *crime*.
 - For help, call the Domestic Violence Hotline (*see More Information*).



- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/hiv
- Office on Women’s Health: www.4woman.gov/owh/hiv.htm
- National Prevention Information Network: www.cdcnpin.org
- GMHC: www.gmhc.org/quickguides/woman.html

311 for Non-Emergency NYC Services • Telephone Interpretation in 170 Languages

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Health & Mental Hygiene News

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