

## How do I talk about sexual health with my dates?



*This tip sheet provides practical information for men who have sex with trans women or trans feminine people\* on how to talk about sexual health and how to get tested.*

### Summary

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are common and can affect anyone. It's important not to make assumptions about someone's sexual health based on their transgender experience or sexuality.
- Trans women sometimes experience degrading language when talking with men about sexual health.
- Having respectful conversations about sexual health is a healthy part of sexual relationships. This includes talking about condom use.
- It's important you look after your own sexual health by getting regular sexual health check-ups.

\* "Men" in this resource refers to cisgender men. "Trans women" refers to trans women, trans feminine people, women who have a trans and gender diverse history or experience, but do not identify as transgender - and other trans feminine culturally-specific identities such as Sistergirls, Fa'afafine and Kinner.

*Sexual health is a shared responsibility. This means looking after your own sexual health by getting regular check-ups, and talking to your dates and partners in a respectful way.*

*Good sexual health practices can also help build trust, intimacy and enhance pleasure, whether it's sex with a hook up or a longer-term partner.*



*“When I’m chatting with someone online and he’s open about the ways he practices safer sex and how recently he’s had a sexual health check-up, that makes me feel a lot more confident in meeting for a hook up or date. It shows a level of maturity and care for himself and his sexual partners that is just sexy.”*  
*Crystal*

## The Basics

*“I’m sick of men asking me about my sexual health when I know they’ve never been into a sexual health clinic themselves. Especially when they ask me if I’m ‘clean’. It’s so stigmatising to ask me that just because I’m trans. I take my sexual health seriously and get check-ups every three months. It would be great if my dates did the same.”*  
*Elektra*

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are common and can affect anyone. It’s important not to make assumptions about someone’s sexual health based on someone’s transgender experience or their sexuality.
- Shaming someone about their sexual health is never ok.
- Always be respectful when talking to trans women about sexual health. Shame and stigma can make us feel bad about ourselves and may affect how we feel about the people we have sex with. Trans women sometimes experience stigmatising or even degrading language when talking to men about sexual health.
- Harmful myths and stereotypes about trans women and about STIs mean that some men feel nervous or hesitant to seek out sexual health information and testing. Educating yourself and getting tested is a great way to look after yourself and your partners.
- STIs are transmitted in a variety of ways and may present differently from person to person. Some people may not have any symptoms at all but can still pass along an STI to a sexual partner. It is important to educate yourself on the different STIs and protection options and how they relate to the kinds of sex you enjoy. [Click here](#) for information on the different kind of STIs and how to prevent them.

- The stigma around HIV is particularly harmful. Many men who have sex with trans women feel anxious about HIV when having sex. There are a lot of great resources on HIV written for gay, bisexual and pansexual men that can help. These resources may also be informative for men who date trans women.

There has been amazing progress in preventing and treating HIV. For up-to-date information on HIV [click here](#).

## Talking about sexual health

Having conversations about sexual health is a healthy part of sexual relationships. Here are some tips on how to talk about it with trans women:

- Talk about what kind of protection you both like to use before you have sex. Always default to the more cautious approach.
- Respect her right to determine what is right for her body. Don't put pressure on her to have sex without a condom. Removing a condom during sex without her explicit consent (stealth) is sexual assault and unlawful in many places, including Victoria.
- Asking if someone is 'clean' implies that anyone who has HIV or an STI is somehow 'dirty'. This is highly offensive and is likely to discourage potential partners. Instead, let her know when you had your last sexual health check-up and then ask if it's ok to ask about hers.

## Choosing protection

Different methods of protection help in different ways.

**Condoms** stop the transmission of HIV and many STIs when used appropriately. To prevent HIV effectively, condoms must not rip or break, and they must be used correctly every time. Remember to use lots of the right lubricant. Some lubes can degrade the latex in condoms. [Click here](#) for more information on how to use condoms.

**PrEP** is a medication that is highly effective at reducing your risk of contracting HIV. It can be taken daily or in advance of condomless sex. It doesn't prevent other STIs. [Click here](#) for more information on how it works

and how to get access in Australia. Talk to your local sexual health or LGBTIQ+ health clinic to find out if you are eligible.

**PEP** is a medication you can take to prevent you getting HIV if you think you have been exposed. Treatment lasts for 28 days and is best started within 72 hours of exposure. It doesn't protect from other STIs. [Click here](#) for more information on how it works and how to get access in Australia. If you are outside of Australia, you can search for "how to get PEP in my local area".

**Effective treatment.** New advances in HIV research and treatment means that we now know that HIV positive people on effective treatment cannot pass on HIV. This is known as an 'undetectable viral load'. [Click here](#) for more information.

## Get tested

Regular check-ups not only protect your own well-being but also show your respect and care for your dates and partners. By being proactive and getting tested regularly, you can ensure early detection and timely treatment if needed. Here are some tips on getting tested:

- Get tested every three months if you're sexually active.
- If you are in a relationship (monogamous or open) and having sex with other people regular testing is particularly important.
- Always get a test if you notice any changes in your body like discharge from your penis or a rash. Refrain from sex until you have got your results and completed any treatment that may be required. Remember that it's possible to have an STI without any symptoms.
- Think about what clinic is the best place to get tested. Try and build a relationship with your regular GP. However, if that doesn't feel safe, consider other options such as specialist sexual health services. They have the most up-to-date testing and treatment practices. LGBTIQ+ health clinics are also a great place to get sexual health care, even if you don't identify as LGBTIQ+. They know a lot about sexual health and are less likely to have negative attitudes about your relationships with trans women.

- It's important you share enough detail so they can conduct the right tests. Let your doctor know how many partners you have had, what prevention methods you used, (e.g. condoms), and what sort of sex you had, e.g. giving or receiving oral sex; giving or receiving anal play. Sharing that your partner/s is trans may help ensure they ask the right questions and you get the right tests.
- Ask for a comprehensive STI test that includes syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. If you're HIV negative or don't know your status you should also get tested for HIV.

In many places anonymous sexual health testing is available.

If you're in Australia and looking for your nearest sexual health centre or testing service, [click here](#). If you are in another country, you can try searching for "sexual health testing in my local area".

If you're concerned about confidentiality, HIV self-testing kits are available. [Click here](#) for information on how to access them in Australia. If you are in another country, try searching for "HIV self-testing kits in my country".

## Testing positive

STIs are a normal part of being sexually active. Many STIs are treatable.

It's important you tell anyone you've had sexual contact with since your last test, where possible, so that they can get tested too. Remember not to place blame or make the other person feel bad. It can happen to anyone!

Here is an example message you can use: "Hey there, just letting you know that I recently tested positive for gonorrhoea. You should get tested too. Sorry, this isn't the most fun message to receive! Let me know how you go. Would love to hook up again some time."

If a recent sexual partner lets you know they have tested positive for an STI, thank them and ask if they are doing ok. They may have found it stressful to let you know. They have done a good thing by sharing their result so you can get tested too.

## If you're looking for support in Australia:

### Qlife

National anonymous and confidential LGBTIQ+ peer support service (including partners)

Website: [qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au)

Phone: 1800 184 527

Opening hours: 3PM to midnight, every day

Telephone and web chat support service

### Say It Out Loud

ACON's sexual, domestic and family violence website *Say It Out Loud* provides information and guidance relating to sexual, family and intimate partner violence in the Australian LGBTIQ+ community.

Website: [sayitoutloud.org.au](http://sayitoutloud.org.au)

### Men's Referral Service

A free, confidential telephone service for men

Phone: 1300 766 491

Open any time.

**For men outside Australia looking for counselling support, try searching online for "trans friendly counselling in my local area".**