

The Rainbow Resource Centre is a non-profit, community based charitable organization that serves as the central agency offering support, information, counselling, referrals, library, and public awareness on issues related to sexual orientation, gender diversity, and anti-homophobia education.

The Rainbow Resource Centre envisions and works toward an equal and diverse society, free of homophobia and discrimination, by encouraging visibility and fostering health and self-acceptance through education, support, resources, and outreach.

**Peer Support/Info Line:**

(204)284.5208 or 1.888.399.0005

(Toll free in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario)

Monday to Friday: 7:30—10:00 pm

(subject to volunteer availability)

**Counselling Intake Line:** 204.452.7508

[counselling@rainbowresourcecentre.org](mailto:counselling@rainbowresourcecentre.org)

**Address:** 170 Scott St.

Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 0L3

**The Rainbow Resource Centre is open:**

Wednesday—Friday: 1:00 pm to 4:30 pm

Monday—Friday: 7:30 pm to 10:00 pm

(subject to staff and volunteer availability)

Please visit our website:

[www.rainbowresourcecentre.org](http://www.rainbowresourcecentre.org)

Women  
who have sex with  
Women  
Info about STIs

For individuals who want to  
learn more about it

Information adapted from *Grrls on Grrls... and HIV*  
2009

## Introduction

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) affects everyone regardless of one's sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, lifestyle, age, culture and profession. Many of us don't think about how women, or those in same-sex female relationships, can contract an STI. In fact, research has shown that women who have sex with women (WSW) often underestimate their risk for STIs and therefore are less likely to practice safer sex or get tested for infections than heterosexual women.

STIs are not only transmitted among men who have sex with men, but are also transmitted among women who have sex with women. You may not even know that you yourself are infected, or that your partner may unknowingly be infected.

## Women who Have Sex with Women

Let's not assume what our sexual behaviors are just because we identify as a lesbian or bisexual.

- Some of us who are lesbian-identified have sex with men.
- Some of us have multiple sex partners.
- Some of us include other sex-play activities such as shaving, tattooing and piercing, which can potentially be risky.
- Some of us have sex with men and women in exchange for money or other necessities.

## Let's Have Sex!

We engage in different kinds of sex. For example, some of us enjoy oral sex (mouth to vagina and/or anus), some of us enjoy vaginal and anal penetration (fingers, fists, etc.), some of us enjoy role-play, and some of us enjoy using sex toys. Sex is a lot of fun, however, it's important think about reducing our risk from contracting or passing along STIs.

## Let's Reduce our Risk

Use condoms. If you have anal or vaginal sex with a flesh penis (biological man), use a latex condom with lots of water-based lube on the outside of the condom. Condoms break more easily if you don't use enough lube. If you are having anal or vaginal sex with a sex toy, make sure you clean it between uses and/or use a condom on them. If you are sharing sex toys, change the condom every time you put it inside.

Female condoms. Female condoms are available in most pharmacies. The female condom provides the same protection against HIV and STIs as the male condom and can be inserted up to 8 hours before having vaginal or anal sex.

Sex dams. A sex dam is one way to reduce risk when performing oral sex (mouth to vagina or anus). To increase your partner's sensation, put some lube on the side of the dam that is going to be touching them. Sex dams also come in a variety of yummy flavors.

ones, both lubricated and unlubricated, are also available. Use mouthwash instead of brushing your teeth before performing oral sex. You can also ask your partner not to come in your mouth.

If you have an STI or vaginal infection, your risk for HIV infection is higher. Many of us don't have any symptoms so it is important to get checked regularly.

Don't douche or give yourself an enema. They weaken the lining of the vagina and anus making it easier to get an STI or HIV.

Plan ahead. Drinking, getting high and having sex together. Before getting drunk or high, make decisions about the kind of sex you are going to have and try to stick to it. Make sure you have condoms/dams and lube with you.

If injecting drugs, don't shoot up alone or with people you don't know. It's important to have someone with you who will make sure you get the help you need if you pass out or overdose. Being unconscious also puts you at risk for sexual assault or getting ripped off.

Using a pipe for drugs? If you use and share a pipe, you may be at risk for TB or Hepatitis B & C. If possible, carry your own pipe but if you must share, wrap a napkin around the end of the pipe before you smoke. If you have unprotected oral sex, open sores or cuts on your lips may make it easier to pass on an STI or for HIV to get into your bloodstream.

Get vaccinated for Hepatitis B. You can get vaccinated at several community health clinics (see resource section at the back of this pamphlet).

## Let's not Make Assumptions About Sex and STIs

- STIs don't discriminate: It doesn't matter if you're from a rural or remote community, or live in a larger city.
- STIs don't have a sexual orientation: It's the sexual behavior itself that puts you at risk, not one's sexual orientation.
- STIs don't have social characteristics: Just because she may be an active volunteer, has two cats, lives alone, has a university degree, or she's simply a good person who treats you well, doesn't mean she doesn't have an STI. She may not even know she's infected.
- STIs don't have an age: Every woman is vulnerable. Whether you are a youth with little sexual experience, or older with a few experiences, you can contract an STI.
- STIs don't have a body type: Whether you live a healthy lifestyle or your health is affected by other issues, once in contact with an STI, your body is vulnerable.
- STIs don't have a profession: She may volunteer and be infected, be a working professional and be infected, or be a prostitute and be infected.
- STIs don't have a sexual identity: Simply looking for an obvious sign isn't good enough. Those infected may be asymptomatic (meaning no sores, rashes, growths, etc.). Some of our sex partner's partners, or previous partners, may be infected and not know it. Past behavior of your sex partners may be a risk for you as well.

## The STI Buffet Chart

Here is a list of STIs that can be passed along from woman to woman:

Name	Primarily spread by...
Chlamydia	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
Genital Herpes	Contact with sores, or skin that does not appear to have sores, unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex, rimming, kissing
Genital Warts	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex, skin-to-skin contact
Gonorrhea	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
Lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV)	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
Syphilis	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex, skin-to-skin contact
Trichomonas	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
Hepatitis A	Rimming, touching a used condom or sex toy, then touching your mouth, sharing needles
Hepatitis B	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex, contact with body fluids, use of needles with infected blood
Hepatitis C	Use of razors, toothbrushes or needles with infected blood, contact with infected blood
Human Papillomavirus (HPV)	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex, skin-to-skin contact
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex, use of needles with infected blood, receiving infected blood products
Vaginitis	Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex, antibiotics, douching, using an IUD for contraception

NOTE: Some STIs are incurable. Talk to a health care professional for treatment or options on how to stay healthy.

## Local Community Resources

### The Women's Health Clinic

419 Graham Ave.  
Phone: 204.947.1517  
Fax: 204.943.3844  
TTY: 204.956.0385

www.womenshealthclinic.org

- Provides health and wellness services, advocacy and research, health education, resources and information

### Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre

1150-A Waverley Street  
Phone: 204.477.1123  
Fax: 204.475.9127  
www.fgwrc.ca

- Provides information, referrals, outreach, counseling and education

### Nine Circles Community Health Centre

705 Broadway  
Phone: 204.940.6001  
Fax: 204.940.6027  
www.ninecircles.ca

- Drop-in, safe and confidential STI/HIV testing, treatment and referral every Wednesday from 1 pm to 7 pm.

### AIDS/STI infoline

Phone: 204.945.2437  
Toll free: 1.800.782.2437  
Monday to Friday: 9:30 am to 6:00 pm

### Klinik Community Health Centre

870 Portage Ave  
Phone: 204.784.4090  
www.klinik.mb.ca

- Provides information, referrals, outreach, counseling and education