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Last night I picked up someone... and something!

A guide to sexually transmissible infections for gay men



Introduction

This booklet provides basic information and colour pictures of some of the most common Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs) found among gay men (HIV+ or HIV-). Some of these infections can be transmitted non-sexually. This booklet is only a guide as not everyone with an STI will show symptoms that look exactly the same as the ones illustrated in this booklet. Some people may have no obvious symptoms, others mild symptoms and some more severe. If you think you have an STI, get a check up. If your doctor doesn't see many gay men or you don't want him/her to know you are gay, go to a sexual health centre (see back page for contacts).

Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs)

STIs are infections that are transmitted through close body contact, usually sexual. Sexual contact includes fucking, sucking, touching, fingering or kissing/licking a dick or arse.

This book has been divided into the following sections for easier reference.

STIs are usually caused by:



Viruses

eg. HIV, herpes,
genital warts



Parasites

eg. crabs,
scabies



Bacteria

eg. chlamydia,
gonorrhoea



Fungi

eg. thrush

Regular Testing

If you are having sex with different casual partners it is a good idea to get tested regularly. An annual test is a good guideline. A sexual health centre or a GP can recommend how often you should get tested. Even if you show no symptoms it is still possible to have an STI and pass on the infection. In this case, getting tested is the only way to know.

If you are in a new relationship, monogamous or otherwise, it is a good time for you and your partner to get a check up. You may have contracted an STI from a previous partner. Regular testing is also recommended if you are having sex outside the relationship.

HIV testing

Before you are tested for HIV your doctor or health care worker (HCW) should discuss the test and its meanings and implications with you. This is known as pre-test counselling. In this discussion the HCW will gauge your understanding of HIV, how it is transmitted and how to protect yourself. The HCW should discuss the implications of a positive or negative result with you, including what supports you might have available after your result. You should find out about the "window period" and if you need to be re-tested. You should always be given the results of your HIV test in person. If you have questions or concerns raise them with the HCW if they haven't been addressed during the discussion.

What does a sexual health test involve?

A gay man having a routine sexual health test may include blood testing for HIV, syphilis and hepatitis A, B and C viruses. You may have to ask specifically for an HIV test. You may be asked to give a urine sample and swabs may be collected from inside the eye of the dick (urethra) and arse for chlamydia and gonorrhoea. A throat swab may also be collected for gonorrhoea.

When making a decision about what tests to offer or perform, the HCW will assess the person's risk by collecting a full sexual health history.

An examination of the external genitals is carried out to detect infections such as genital herpes, genital warts, pubic lice and scabies. This examination is also useful in detecting other non-infectious conditions such as genital skin conditions eg. sweat rashes, or ingrown hairs. The part of the body tested depends on which parts of the body are put at risk from sexual contact eg. dick, throat or arse.

1 minute self examination

Grab a small hand mirror. Find a private place, get naked and look for sores, blisters, rashes, itching, redness, swollen bits, unusual odour or fluid discharge on or around your dick, arse and balls. Some helpful hints include:

- Lift and look under the balls.
- If uncircumcised, pull back the foreskin.
- Look at the area between your arse hole and your balls (this is where the hand mirror becomes useful!).
- Check your pubic hair closely for small mites, eggs or lumps.
- Gently squeeze the dick along the shaft to check for any unusual discharge that is smelly or creamy in colour. (It is common for some men to find some fluid when doing this which does not necessarily mean that you have an STI.)



Safe Sex

Of late, there has been a lot of concern about the number of gay men not using condoms which places them at risk of many STIs. Most gay men know that the best way to prevent HIV is to use a condom and water based lubricant while having anal sex. But safe sex for HIV does not necessarily mean safe sex for all other STIs.

Condoms

A condom is a thin latex tube that is rolled onto an erect dick and prevents the exchange of cum during sex.



Some guidelines for using condoms are:

- Choose the right size. Condoms come in a variety of sizes including tighter fitting, regular, flared and larger fitting.
- Check the use by date and the Australian Standard mark.
- Take care not to tear the condom when opening up the packet.
- Make sure the dick is fully erect.
If uncircumcised, pull back the foreskin.
- Hold the condom by the teat and roll the condom all the way down to the base of the dick.
- Always use a water based lubricant or silicon lubricant. Oil based lubricants weaken condoms causing them to break.
- Immediately after cumming, while the dick is still hard, take off the condom. Hold onto the base of the condom when pulling out.
- Use condoms only once and if having sex with multiple partners, use a new condom for each person.
- Remember to dispose of a used condom in the garbage, not down the toilet.

Lube

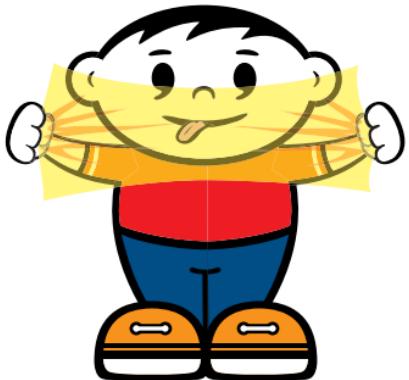
Always use a water based or silicon lubricant. Oil based lubricants weaken condoms causing them to break. Do not use saliva as lube as it can dry out quickly, as well as cause condoms to break down. A dry fuck (no lube) is a common way for a condom to break, making it a riskier fuck. The more lube the better. Using plenty of lube is one way to prevent condom breakage. You may need to re-apply lube several times when fucking. Never use Nonoxynol-9, as it causes severe irritation for many gay men making it easier to contract/pass on HIV.

Dams

Dams are rectangular pieces of latex that are often flavoured and are used for oral sex and rimming. Some guidelines for using dams are:

- Place the dam over the area about to be licked and hold it in place.
- Use only one side of the dam.
- A condom split down the middle can be used as a dam.

- Do not share dams and use a new dam for each person.
- Use a new dam if you switch partners
- Using water based lubricant on the body side of the dam can increase sensitivity.



HIV positive men and STIs

For gay men with HIV, here are some things to consider:

- The STI infection may be more severe and more difficult to treat. It is also more likely that viral infections like herpes will recur more often than for an HIV negative person.
- Infection with another STI, eg. gonorrhoea, can dramatically increase the viral load in the body because the immune system is fighting both the HIV infection as well as the other STI. An increased viral load means a greater risk to an HIV positive person's health.
- An increased viral load also makes passing on HIV to a negative person more likely if having unsafe sex.
- Sexually transmitted infections may speed up HIV progression. Other infections may help HIV reproduce and infect cells, and those infections may themselves damage the immune system. Many infections are likely to trigger HIV replication simply because they stimulate an immune system response. That immune response will include the activation of dormant HIV in immune cells leading to the production of new HIV and the infection of further cells.

HIV negative men and STIs

STIs can cause the skin or membranes in your dick, arse and throat to become sore, inflamed or bleed. This makes it easier for HIV to get into the bloodstream, increasing the chance of infection.



Viruses

HIV/AIDS

Description

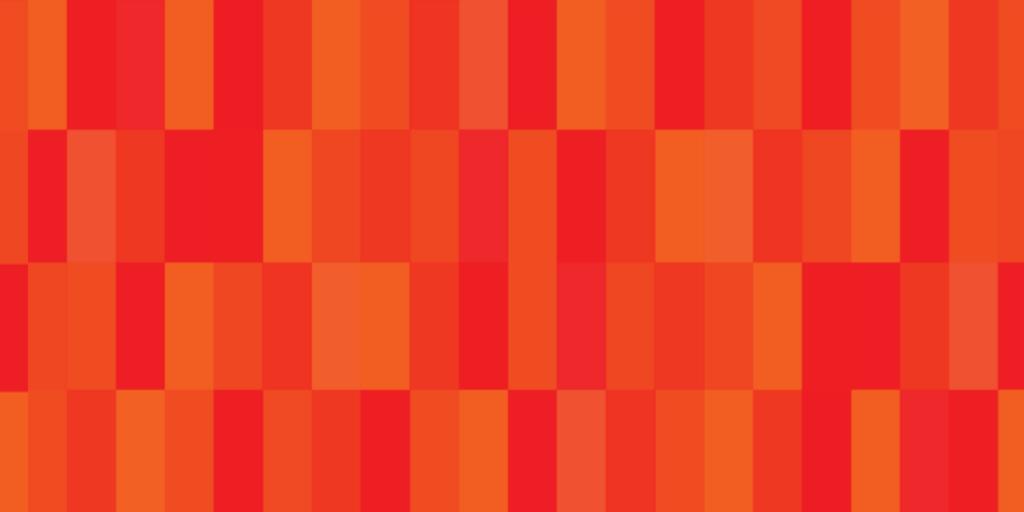
Perhaps the most well known STI, HIV is also of concern to most gay men. This virus has devastated many gay communities around the world and continues to spiral out of control in many cities.

Although we know more about HIV than ever before there is still **no cure** and **no vaccine**. HIV treatments are complex, have numerous side effects and are not always successful. HIV is Human Immunodeficiency Virus that causes the failure of part of the immune system.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) refers to the range of specific illnesses that people with HIV may get when their immune system is badly damaged.

The presence of HIV in the body is not an AIDS diagnosis. It is possible for people to have HIV for many years but no symptoms which define AIDS.

HIV infects and destroys key cells in the body. It particularly targets a cell called CD4 (also called a T4 or T helper cell). The CD4 cells are the 'generals' of the 'immune system army'. The CD4 cells tell other cells of the immune system what to do when an invading organism, germ or cancer is found in the body. What HIV does is kill off the CD4 cells (the 'generals' in the army). When the 'generals' of the 'immune



system army' are killed off, the rest of the immune system doesn't know how to fight off invaders.

Transmission

HIV can be sexually transmitted by blood, cum, pre-cum or vaginal fluids. Any activity that allows infected blood, cum, pre-cum or vaginal fluids to enter the bloodstream of an HIV negative person will place that person at risk of getting HIV.

The most common ways HIV can be passed on are:

- ① **Anal sex** if you are fucking or being fucked without using condoms and water based lubricant.
- ② **Sharing drug injecting equipment** or needles used for body piercing or tattooing.

Traces of HIV can be present in a number of other body fluids like saliva and mucous, but not in sufficient concentration to transmit the virus.

Signs and symptoms

When a person is newly infected with HIV they may show no symptoms at all. Some people experience seroconversion illness in the weeks following infection and show flu like symptoms which may include fever, swollen glands, sore throat and a rash on the body.



When will it show up?

The most common test for HIV is an HIV antibody test. The antibodies can take up to three months to develop. This is called the 'window period'. There are other tests which measure the amount of virus in your blood by measuring for HIV proteins, an antigen test. Talk to your doctor about your testing options.

Treatments

There is no vaccine or cure for HIV. There are several treatment options available. Best practice in therapeutic treatment is currently provided through combination therapy which usually uses three or more anti-HIV drugs simultaneously.

Prevention

HIV infection is best prevented by using condoms and plenty of water based lubricant when giving or receiving anal sex. If you have cuts or sores in your mouth or if you've had recent dental work, use a condom when giving oral sex or avoid oral sex altogether.

Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)

If you think you may have been exposed to HIV there is a treatment option available that may prevent infection. PEP is a combination of at least two anti HIV drugs taken every day over a four week period. PEP is not a simple treatment. Research shows that PEP may decrease the chances of HIV transmission. Taking PEP does not guarantee the prevention of HIV infection. These drugs are extremely powerful and can cause unpleasant side effects like cramps, diarrhoea, vomiting, headaches, and tiredness. The side effects can be treated with other drugs but sticking to the dosing is crucial.

PEP is most effective when taken immediately or within a couple of hours of exposure to HIV.

The earlier you start PEP the better, although it may still be effective if taken within 72 hours of the incident.



If you think you've been exposed seek medical advice as soon as possible. You can get PEP from doctors who prescribe HIV drugs, sexual health centres or hospital emergency departments. Due to long waiting times at hospital emergency departments, if possible seek advice from a prescribing GP or sexual health centre first.

Vaccines

There are many HIV vaccines at different stages of trialing around the world. At this stage there are no results from any trial that demonstrates whether a vaccine actually prevents HIV infection in humans.

Over the next few years the results from these trials will be released, however an effective vaccine is not anticipated to be available within the next 5 – 10 years.

Safe sex (using condoms and water-based lube) is still the best prevention strategy available.

Herpes

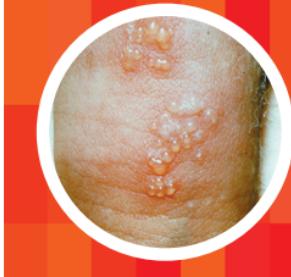
Description

A virus that's caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV).

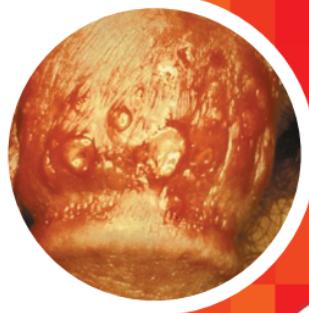
There are two types of HSV.

Type 1 is usually found around the mouth and is commonly known as cold sores.

Type 2 is usually found around the dick or arse areas.



Herpes



Transmission

Can be passed on both sexually and non-sexually during skin to skin contact by direct contact with a sore on the mouth, dick or arse.

Herpes can also be transmitted during foreplay when an infected area comes into contact with another person. It can also be transmitted when there are no obvious symptoms present.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms may not always be present but can include:

- Itching or tingly feeling around the infected area
- An outbreak of painful blisters or sores which later form scabs
- Flu like symptoms may be present

When will it show up?

Generally 2 – 30 days after being exposed if symptoms are going to occur but it may take months to years.

Treatment

There is no cure but there are treatments that can reduce symptoms and speed up the recovery. The possibility of repeated outbreaks varies from person to person, but outbreaks may become less frequent and in time may stop altogether.

Prevention

Condoms can reduce the risk of transmission but do not always cover the infected area. The virus may be present on the balls or arse area.



Genital and anal warts

Description

A virus (HPV—human papilloma virus) that may cause warts on the dick, arse or surrounding areas.

Transmission

Can be passed on by skin to skin contact with an infected person. Warts can also be transmitted during foreplay when infected areas come into contact with another person.

Signs and symptoms

There may be no symptoms but they include small bumpy warts around the dick, balls and arse and discomfort when going to the toilet if the arse is infected. Warts are often painless.

When will it show up?

Generally 2 – 3 months but may be much longer.

Treatment

There is currently no cure for genital and anal warts but a doctor can remove the warts by freezing, burning, laser or by applying liquid wart paints or creams. Recurrences can occur and treatment sometimes requires several visits.

Prevention

Condoms can reduce the risk of transmission but do not always cover the infected area. The warts may be present on the balls or arse area.



Genital Warts



Anal Warts

Hepatitis B

Description

A virus which causes inflammation of the liver.

Transmission

By infected blood or cum entering a person's bloodstream through activities like unprotected fucking, sharing injecting equipment, toothbrushes or razors, oral sex, tattooing and body piercing with unsterile equipment.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms may include loss of appetite, tiredness, nausea, yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice) and dark urine.

When will it show up?

1 – 6 months after exposure.

Treatment

Most people recover from hepatitis B. Some retain the virus in their body — there are treatments available for these people. See your doctor.

Prevention

There is an effective hepatitis B vaccination. An hepatitis A and B combination vaccination is also available. See your doctor.

A word on Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a virus that can cause serious damage to the liver, with some people developing cirrhosis of the liver. The virus is spread by HCV positive blood entering another person's bloodstream.



Although there is some uncertainty about HCV being sexually transmitted, it is not classified as an STI.

If HCV is transmitted during sexual activity, it is likely that it would be through blood to blood contact. Transmission

Hepatitis A

Description

A virus which causes inflammation of the liver.

Transmission

By small particles of infected shit entering a person's mouth through activities like arse play, and rimming or by not washing your hands after sex with an infected person. It can also be passed on through using eating and drinking utensils previously handled by an infected person.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms include mild flu like illness, vomiting, abdominal pain and jaundice.

When will it show up?

2 – 4 weeks after exposure.

Treatment

Most people who get hepatitis A will recover and develop an immunity to the virus.

Prevention

There is an effective hepatitis A vaccination. An hepatitis A and B combination vaccination is also available. See your doctor.

through sexual body fluids is thought to be extremely rare.

People who inject drugs and share equipment are at a high risk of contracting HCV. If injecting, do not share any injecting equipment, including spoons and tourniquets. For more information call the Hep C Helpline on (02) 9332-1599 or toll free 1800-803-990 or go to www.hepatitisaustralia.com if outside of NSW.





Molluscum



Molluscum Contagiosum

Description

A pox virus which is a common condition in children. The virus stays in the skin for life.

Transmission

Molluscum can be transferred by direct skin to skin contact with someone who has the infection. It can be transmitted through sexual and non-sexual contact with infected areas.

Signs and symptoms

The lesions look like waxy pimples that have a dimple in the middle. Lesions can appear in the genital area as well as other parts of the body. Sexually transmitted lesions are usually found on the lower abdomen, pubic area and thighs.

When will it show up?

Usually between 2 – 12 weeks after exposure.

Treatment

Molluscum is treated by freezing the lesions off the body. Alternatively the core of the lump, which contains the virus, can be extracted with a fine needle.

Prevention

Only the area covered by a condom, glove or dam is protected from the virus.



Parasites

Pubic lice (crabs)

Description

Tiny mites that live on the skin at the base of pubic hair. Crabs lay eggs which are attached to the hairs and are usually seen in the pubic area. They can also be found in beards, armpits, chest hair and eyelashes.

Transmission

By close physical contact including sharing clothes, bed sheets or towels.

Signs and symptoms

Crabs can cause an intense itching in the pubic regions. Close examination of the pubic hair should find tiny brown lice and/or white eggs attached to the pubic hair.

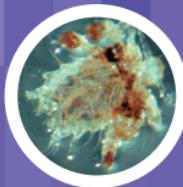
When will it show up?

3 days to several weeks after exposure.

Treatment

You can effectively cure crabs yourself with appropriate genital lice shampoos and creams available at pharmacies.





Pubic lice (crabs)



Prevention

There's no way of preventing the initial infection of crabs. To prevent crabs from recurring after an outbreak, wash everything that may have come into contact with the lice in warm soapy water including bed linen, clothes, towels and underwear. Partners and anyone in close physical contact should also be treated. It is advisable to repeat the treatment after 7 days.

Scabies

Description

An infection caused by tiny mites, (smaller than crabs) that burrow under the skin.

Transmission

Passed on by skin to skin contact, sexual or otherwise.

Signs and Symptoms

Scabies are tiny and hard to see. The most common symptoms are a rash or itching caused by the mite burrowing under the skin to lay eggs.





Scabies



The mites prefer warm areas such as armpits and groin but are also commonly found in the spaces between the fingers and the toes.

When will it show up?

Usually noticed within 4 weeks.

Treatment

You can effectively cure scabies yourself with appropriate scabies lotions available at pharmacies.

Prevention

It is difficult to prevent catching scabies because it is passed on by close physical contact. To prevent scabies from recurring after an outbreak, wash everything that may have come into contact with the mites in hot soapy water including bed linen, clothes, towels and underwear. All contacts including people you live with need to have treatment and it is advisable to repeat it after 7 days.





Bacteria

Gonorrhoea

Description

A bacterium that infects a person's dick, arse, throat or eyes.

Transmission

It is easily transmitted by giving or receiving anal sex, oral sex and arse play such as fingering and fisting. Touching an infected dick or arse and then touching your own dick, arse or eyes can also transmit gonorrhoea.

Signs and symptoms

It is quite common to have no symptoms. However symptoms can include a dry, sore throat, itchiness and pain during bowel movements, a clear or yellow discharge from the dick and pain or burning when urinating.

When will it show up?

2 – 10 days after exposure.

Treatment

It is easily cured with antibiotics.





Gonorrhoea



Prevention

Using a condom and lube can help prevent infection although safe sex for HIV is not completely safe for gonorrhoea. It can be transmitted through oral sex or by touching an infected area and then touching your own dick, arse or eyes. Regular testing is recommended. Washing your hands with soap and water immediately after sex can help prevent transmission, especially if having sex with multiple partners.

Chlamydia

Description

A bacterium similar to gonorrhoea which can infect the arse, dick and throat.

Transmission

It is easily transmitted by giving or receiving anal sex, oral sex and arse play such as fingering and fisting.

Signs and symptoms

It is quite common to have no symptoms. However, symptoms can include a discharge from the dick and a stinging sensation while pissing.



When will it show up?

Usually within 2 – 14 days but can take as long as 21 days.

Treatment

It is easily cured with antibiotics.

Prevention

Using a condom and water based lubricant can help prevent infection, although safe sex for HIV is not completely safe for chlamydia. It can be transmitted by touching an infected area and then touching your own dick or arse. Regular testing is recommended. Washing your hands with soap and water immediately after sex can help prevent transmission especially if having sex with multiple partners.

Syphilis

Description

Caused by a bacterium which infects your blood.

Transmission

Transmitted by giving or receiving anal sex, oral sex and arse play with an infected person. A person can easily pass the disease to sex partners when first or second stage signs or symptoms are present.

Signs and symptoms

It is common for the symptoms of syphilis to go unnoticed. The signs and symptoms



of syphilis usually follow 3 stages all having different symptoms.

- ① Stage 1: a painless red sore on your dick, balls, mouth, throat or arse which turns into a scab and then heals.
- ② Stage 2: A rash on the palms of the hand, soles of the feet or other parts of the body. In addition to rashes, second stage symptoms can also include fever, swollen lymph glands, sore throat, patchy hair loss, headaches, weight loss, muscle aches and tiredness. These symptoms usually occur 7 – 10 weeks after exposure.
- ③ Stage 3: If untreated, syphilis remains in the body and begins to damage internal organs including the brain, nerves, eyes, heart, blood vessels, liver, bones and joints. In about one-third of untreated people this internal damage shows up many years later. This damage may be serious enough to cause death. Syphilis can be especially damaging in people with HIV.

When will it show up?

Early stages of infection may show up
10 – 90 days after exposure.

Treatment

Syphilis is easily cured with antibiotics. If left untreated for many years syphilis can cause serious damage to any organ in the body. This is quite rare, however, due to the use of antibiotics and regular sexual health testing.



Syphilis



Prevention

Only areas protected by condoms, dams or gloves are protected from infection. Touching any sore or rash should be avoided.

Gut Infections

Description

Caused by bacteria including amoebiasis, giardiasis, shigellosis and salmonellosis.

Transmission

Passed on sexually or otherwise through food and water. Sexual transmission can occur when small amounts of infected shit gets into your mouth from either your fingers or rimming, fucking, scat, and handling used dildos.

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms can include diarrhoea, stomach cramps, excessive farting and fever. Can be very serious for HIV+ people.

When will it show up?

Symptoms may show up within several hours after exposure.

Treatment

Anti-diarrhoea treatments are often enough to treat gut infections but antibiotics can also be used.

Prevention

Gut infections can be avoided by wearing gloves for arse play or by using a dam for rimming. Hands should be washed after handling used condoms or after having sex involving arse play.





Fungi

Thrush (Candidiasis)

Description

Caused by a fungus and is more likely to occur if you are HIV positive.

Transmission

Appears in your mouth or on your dick and sometimes in your arse. It is not an STI but it is sometimes related to sex.

Signs and Symptoms

Redness, rash or itching on the part of the body affected.

Treatment

Thrush is treated with anti fungal creams or tablets.

Prevention

Thrush can be sexually transmitted but usually arises independent of sex (as it is a fungus). Wear loose clothing and natural fibres — avoid synthetic fibres that make you sweat.



Thrush



Text: David McGuigan; Education Manager
Greg Staples; Gay Education Project Officer
Original Design: Richard Hughes

Contact Details

ACT

Canberra Sexual Health Centre	(02) 6244 2184
AIDS Action Council	(02) 6257 2855
PLWHA (ACT)	(02) 6257 4985

Northern Territory

Clinic 34 (Sexual Health Clinic)	(08) 8922 8007
NT AIDS Council	(08) 8941 1711
PLWHA (NT)	(08) 8941 1711

South Australia

Clinic 275 (Sexual Health Clinic)	(08) 8226 6025 1800 806 490
Sexual Health Hotline	(08) 8364 0444
AIDS Council of SA	(08) 8362 1611
PLWHA (SA)	(08) 8293 3700

Acknowledgments

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Clinic 275 (Adelaide)

Sydney Sexual Health Centre

Thanks to: Barry Edwards, Vicki Knight, Dr Chris Bourne, Judy Ritchie

Tasmania

Sexual Health Clinics:

Hobart	(03) 6233 3557
Launceston	(03) 6336 2216
Devonport	(03) 6221 7759

Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis C
& Related Diseases

(03) 6234 1242

Positive People Tasmania

(03) 6234 1242

Queensland

Queensland Association for Healthy Communities (07) 3017 1777

For statewide referral to Sexual Health Clinics,
and Queensland Positive People offices call:

The Mens Sexual Health Line: 1800 155 141

Western Australia

Royal Perth Hospital Sexual Health Clinic (08) 9224 2178

Fremantle Hospital Sexual Health Clinic (08) 9431 2149

WA AIDS Council (08) 94820000