



# **SEXUAL HEALTH FOR MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN**

**A GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS**

# SEXUAL HEALTH FOR MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN



Regional  
HIV/AIDS  
Connection

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A GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

# WHO ARE WE?

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## MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (MSM)

We are men of all races, ages, sizes, shapes, and backgrounds. Some of us are trans (men who were assigned female at birth) and some of us are cisgender (men who were assigned male at birth).

Although we are all men who have sex with men based on our sexual behaviors, we may identify as gay, bisexual, 2-spirit, queer, straight, or we may identify elsewhere on a spectrum of sexualities.

Many of us struggle with accessing informed, inclusive, and stigma-free healthcare, and we would like to help equip you with some of the tools necessary to care for us in ways that make it a little easier for everyone.



A photograph of a couple in a hospital setting. A man in a white t-shirt is lying down, and a woman in a dark shirt is leaning over him, holding his hand. The image is in a muted blue-grey color.

# ASK US

## WHO OUR SEXUAL PARTNERS ARE

- It is important not to make assumptions about our sexual orientation
- Our current partner(s) may or may not be indicative of our sexual orientation
- We need to be treated with dignity and respect

"I shared with the doctor that I identify as bisexual. He responded, *A person is either gay or not.*"



“Doctors are so afraid to be awkward that they just don't ask about what kind of sex I have.”



## ASK US

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### WHAT SEXUAL ACTIVITIES WE'RE ENGAGING IN

- There can be some pretty broad generalizations made about the types of sex we engage in; sometimes, we're not asked about our sexual behaviors at all
- We really need our health care providers to model for us that it's okay to discuss sex



# ASK US

## WHAT WE'RE DOING TO AVOID STIs, INCLUDING HIV

- People have lots of different kinds of sex
- Sometimes we use condoms or other barriers, and sometimes we don't
- Please help us ensure that we know how to manage our own individual risks, and work with us to create a non-judgmental space to discuss them

"I assume I'm not at risk for HIV or anything like that if the doctor doesn't bring it up."





# ASK US

## ABOUT OUR MENTAL HEALTH

- There is a strong connection between how we feel mentally and what risks we may take sexually
- As MSM, we often find ourselves marginalized as a result of stigma; screening for mental health concerns is an important component of our overall healthcare



# ASK US

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## WHEN OUR LAST HIV TEST WAS

- We may often feel too nervous or embarrassed to ask about sexual health services
- Being proactive in talking with us about STI and HIV testing helps lessen some of the stress we may feel around these issues
- Help us plan for regular HIV testing in the future

"The doctor didn't just assume my sexual orientation, so it was actually a good STI test experience."





# ASK US

## ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIPS

- Violence and abuse can happen in all types of relationships, but men are rarely screened for intimate partner/domestic violence
- Ask us about any concerns we may have about the health and safety of our relationships (without assuming monogamy)

# ASK US

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## IF WE USE SUBSTANCES

- Lots of people use substances for a variety of reasons
- Recreational drug use and condomless sex are often linked
- If we identify that our substance use is becoming a problem, help us make plans to use more safely, or help us connect with the necessary supports

"I don't want a lecture,  
don't want to be judged,  
and don't want anyone  
thinking that I'm a  
'stereotypical' gay guy."



A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's face and hands. The person is looking down at a smartphone held in both hands. They have a visible tattoo on their left forearm and are wearing a beaded bracelet on the same wrist. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

## ASK US

### IF WE KNOW WHERE WE CAN GO FOR MORE INFO

- It is important to have a list of relevant sexual health resources and referrals available for us
- You may be able to offer STI and HIV testing, but please know that we may want to be tested anonymously, or require peer support
- **sexualhealthontario.ca** can provide people with a list of nearby clinics and access to experts on sexual health
- The AIDS and Sexual Health Info Line provides free, province-wide, and multilingual assistance and counselling; their toll-free number is **1-800-668-2437**



## ASK US

### ABOUT EXAMINATION & VACCINATION OPTIONS

- Men who have sex with men are at a higher risk for Hepatitis A and B, as well as HPV-associated diseases and conditions

“My doctor does her homework, and I really appreciate that. It makes for a well-rounded exam.”





"These things can be tough to discuss. But it makes it much easier when I feel comfortable and heard."



## ASK US

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### IF WE HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR YOU

- Give us the time and space to ask questions and to express our concerns
- An extra moment or two spent with each of us can make a tremendous difference
- As healthcare providers, you are our trusted advisors; we can be more forthcoming with professionals who demonstrate concern for our well-being





# THANK YOU

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