

Your Sexual Health

ADDRESSING THE SEXUAL HEALTH OF HIV POSITIVE MEN.

Herpes and HIV infected? Data highlights treatment options

In November 2007 researchers from the University of Washington-Seattle reported exciting findings from a study of herpes in gay men with HIV-infection. Men in the study had both HIV and herpes infection. Patients were started on herpes treatment—Valtrex 500 mg tablets, one pill twice a day—and the scientists followed them over time while they were on and off the herpes treatment. None of the men was on HIV treatment; 80% of the men had no history or symptoms of anal or genital herpes.

When patients were on herpes treatment their HIV viral load was lower in their blood and rectal fluids. When the herpes treatment was stopped their HIV viral load increased to pre-treatment levels in both the blood and rectal fluids.

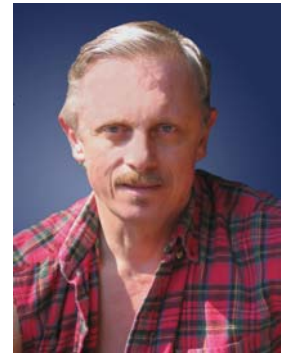
Because the amount of HIV in blood and rectal fluid is directly related to how fast persons with HIV infection progress and also how likely they are to spread HIV, the fact that herpes treatment lowered both of those tests is very important. Treating patients with HIV infection who also have herpes with medicine for herpes may slow down the progression of HIV infection and reduce the spread of HIV.

All HIV-infected patients should know their herpes status. Herpes status can be determined with an easy blood test. The test measures herpes simplex virus type-2 (HSV-2) antibody. A high antibody level means that a patient has herpes and was infected some time in the past. A test with no or very low antibody level means that a patient does not have herpes (or in rare circumstances that a patient is in the 'window-period' before antibody develops). Persons with a positive test do not need another test. Once infected, unfortunately, a person is infected for life. Sexually active men with a negative test should get retested every year.

Continued on page 2

METH – it effects more than just the user...

Having lived through the 80's in San Francisco, and through the most horrible years of the AIDS epidemic, I've witnessed some really tough challenges to our gay community, challenges that for the most part, we have met, changing our community and our city.



I was diagnosed HIV positive in '86 when there was no treatment at all; today my doctor tells me he is more concerned about my blood pressure and the long term effects of AIDS meds than about my HIV.

Although I did my share of experimenting with pot and LSD in college, the handful of club drugs has never really appealed to me. I needed to take care of myself, and weekend binges was not part of that. So I thought I didn't have to worry about the damage I was hearing about with meth, and how it was ruining so many lives. *Boy, was I wrong.*

A little over four years ago my partner of 20 years and I were in couple's counseling, and it was revealed to me that he was using meth, and using it regularly. I felt totally blindsided. I came to understand that he was self-medicating for his depression. Our roller coaster emotional life had been accelerated by crystal, and my most ardent attempts at caretaking and holding the relationship together were useless while meth was a part of our lives. I moved out of the apartment in which I lived for twenty years so I could get off the roller coaster.

Continued on page 2

Compliments of



MOMSpHarmacy
HELPING YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE.



energy
92.7 fm
pure dance

n2mansex.com™
A new playground for men

METH Continued from Page 1

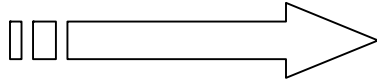
The usual advice when dealing with an addicted person is to practice “tough love.” If you don’t you’re “enabling” or “co-dependent.” But when you turn your back on your friend, who will he turn to? Probably his drugging buddies. I didn’t want to sever this relationship I had been in for 20 years, for god sakes. We continued with counseling. Six months later he flew to Minnesota for rehab. The good news is that today, four years later, he is clean from meth, and our friendship is strong.

The time right after I found out he was using was really tough for me. I knew nothing about meth and why it was so addictive. I didn’t know how to respond to his needs. I felt guilty and in part blamed myself for this mess. And I really didn’t have anyone to talk to except my therapist.

There are a number of resources for meth users. But I could find no resources or support for “friends and family” of gay users.

My education and recovery over these years has involved doing what I can as a community member to advocate for “friends and family,” to organize a town forum, and to urge folks in public health to give us a hand. I feel very fortunate that the STD Prevention office has responded and is now supporting a “Buddies” program.

If you have concerns about a friend, buddy or partner who is using meth, or know someone who is struggling with these issues, I invite you to join us in this powerful program



Herpes... Continued from Page 1

It is important to know that even a person who does not have any symptoms of herpes (rash, sores, redness) can still spread infection. In San Francisco about 25% (1 in 4) gay men and other men who have sex with men have antibody levels indicating herpes infection. Men with a positive herpes test can spread infection. Condoms are very effective at decreasing the spread of infection.

The Seattle study treated men who only had a positive blood test. Having symptoms of herpes was not a requirement to be in the study. Herpes treatment seemed to benefit those men with a positive blood test regardless of symptoms.

Please speak to your doctor about herpes and HIV infection. Ask him or her for a herpes blood test and learn your herpes status. Take control of your health, stay up to date on the newest scientific information and with that knowledge enjoy yourself.

More information on herpes can be found at www.sfcityclinic.org.

Best,
Dr. K

Jeffrey D. Klausner, MD, MPH
Deputy Health Officer

A new online resource from the STD Prevention & Control Services - STD & Substance Use Project



It can be really tough to watch a friend's quality of life change due to the use of drugs like methamphetamine.

It affects many of the people in his circle—friends, co-workers, buddies, family, boyfriend, and partner.

It can be difficult to know what is the right thing to do, or what is going to work, and what is going to help, as well as sort out the feelings.

Drawtheline.org's Buddies Program is a safe space for individuals who want to work out these challenges. We share information about meth and its effects; exchange coping strategies, ways to reduce the stress and harm for those dealing with the day-to-day consequences of crystal meth.

For more information, visit drawtheline.org/buddies or contact Buzz Bense at gaymenshealth-sf@earthlink.net

Here are some of the topics that will be discussed:

- Why people use: sexual expectations, depression, isolation, job stress, self-esteem, etc.
- Myths and misconceptions around meth use and users
- How and when to have that “difficult conversation” with the user through role playing
- How to communicate effectively. Adapting motivational interviewing techniques for the layperson
- How to set boundaries and take care of yourself
- How to access treatment and recovery services
- How to obtain personal support
- How to create a community of on-going support for ourselves and in the larger gay community

Use Meth?
Thinking about cutting down or quitting?
We're studying a medication that may help.
\$10-\$35 per study visit.
Call or visit our website to find out more about participating in a study exploring a medical alternative to crystal meth use for gay and bisexual men.
415.554.9013
www.sfbump.com



www.bumpsf.com

The S.F. Department of Public Health is enrolling gay and bi men in an ongoing study for guys who use meth. BUMP is a series of 3 studies testing if medication taken daily for 12 weeks helps men reduce or quit their meth use. The studies are being led by Dr. Grant Colfax, Director of the HIV Prevention Section.

Meth has become a major health problem in our community. Many guys begin using meth just on weekends or when going out. Unfortunately, for too many, meth use becomes more and more frequent. About 1 in 5 gay men in San Francisco have used meth in the past 3-6 months, and about 1 in 20 uses meth at least once per week. Meth has a wide range of negative health effects, including erectile dysfunction, paranoia, rapid heart rate, tooth loss, and depression. Meth also impacts HIV by making it easier to forget to take medications and by making users 2-3 times more likely to not use condoms.

Statistics like these led the DPH to try to find new ways to help guys get off meth. “We know that treatment programs can be very effective, but they are not affordable or accessible for everyone. Also, some men that just want to reduce their use would not be appropriate for abstinence-based programs,” said Rob Guzman, who heads recruitment efforts for the study. “It takes some commitment, with weekly visits and counseling at each visit, but participants so far have enjoyed being part of the study, and feel like they are giving back to the community. Participants are also paid \$10-35 each visit.”

The studies enroll 30-90 each and will not definitively answer whether or not the medications help guys reduce sexual risk behavior due to meth use. However, they will help prepare for larger studies which will answer that important question. Potential participants should be aware that they have a 50-50 chance of getting active drug or a placebo.

Men who are interested should contact the confidential BUMP study line at 415-554-9013 or visit www.sfbump.com.

EROS
presents
**A Safer Sex Guide
for Gay Men**
erossf.com 2051 Market St. San Francisco, CA 94114
In our Gay community it's important that we look out for ourselves, and each other. No matter what type of sex you are having you are still at risk for STIs & STDs. Sex should be fun and you should feel free to be dirty, nasty, kinky, and/or slutty, but make sure to take care of yourself at the same time.
Be Good to Your Body

EROS Releases New Gay Sex Resource

SAN FRANCISCO – The venerable and popular safe sex club, EROS at 2051 Market Street in San Francisco, is celebrating their 15th Anniversary by rolling out a new back pocket guide to gay sexual health. The postcard size resource was developed during the summer, utilizing an intern from Antioch College who is a graduate of the SF Sex Information training.

In recent years, EROS has relied upon educational and health marketing from community partners, such as STOP AIDS Project, SF Department of Public Health, and the SF AIDS Foundation. “We’ll continue to use those resources,” said Ken Rowe, Director of Community Relations and Education at EROS, “but after 15 years, we’ve heard some specific questions come up over and over again, and we wanted to address them.” Owing a lot to previous grass roots efforts such as those from the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgences, STOP AIDS Project, and St. James Infirmary this new resource brings the focus of self care back to basics.

The card is entitled “A Safer Sex Guide for Gay Men” and specifically covers “Be Good to Your Body”, “Know Your Boundaries”, “Get Tested and Communicate”, “Protect Yourself and Play Safe” and specifically covers Safe Sex when visiting a sex club. The card will be distributed at EROS, throughout the community and on a new section of the www.erossf.com website.

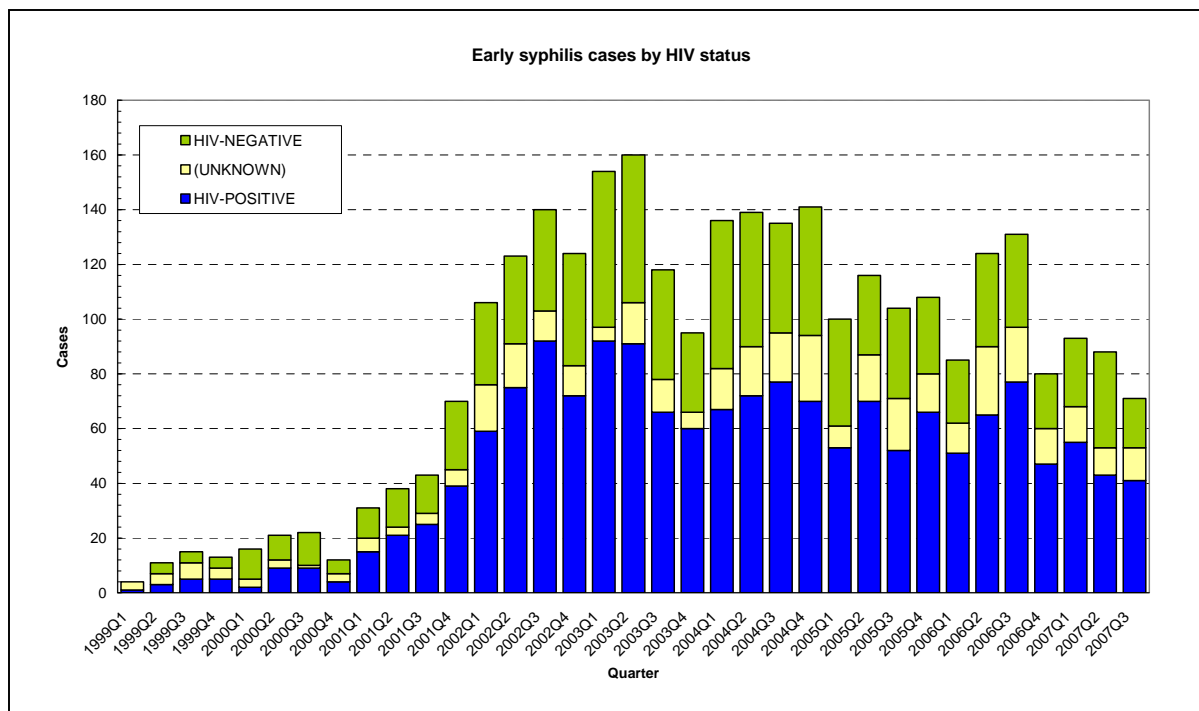
EROS Factoid

Since January 2007, over 1000 copies of the 8 page booklet “Safer Sex for Transguys” have been distributed by Trannywood Pictures, a project of EROS – the Center for Safe Sex which can be viewed at www.trannywoodpictures.com.

Having HIV doesn't make you invincible. You are still at risk for STDs!

Following years of coordinated prevention efforts, San Francisco is seeing a decline in syphilis. After peaking in 2004 with 551 cases, declines in reported syphilis began in 2005 and continued in 2006. From January through October 2007, 292 cases of early syphilis were reported, a 21% decline from the same period in 2006. Among the early syphilis cases reported thus far in 2007, 97% were male, 88% were men who have sex with men (MSM) and 63% of those with known HIV status were HIV-infected. Declines have also been seen with respect to rectal gonorrhea, with a 15% decline in reported cases thus far this year. However, there has been an 11% increase in reported rectal chlamydia from January to October 2007 compared to the same period in 2006.

SFDPH recommends all sexually active MSM get screened for syphilis at least annually, and MSM with multiple partners get tested for syphilis every 3-6 months. Because syphilis can increase HIV viral load and decrease CD4 T cell counts, sexually active HIV-infected MSM should get a syphilis test with every routine blood draw. Also, it is important to remember that unprotected anal sex between HIV positive persons can still expose both partners to syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and other STDs. Free syphilis testing is available at www.STDTest.org. For more information about syphilis, visit the San Francisco City Clinic website at www.sfcityclinic.org/providers.



You always have choices when it comes to your sexual health; **STDtest.org** to register for a free syphilis test at a local lab & **inSPOT.org** to let your partners know when you have been infected with an STD.

Your Sexual Health is a periodic newsletter designed to promote routine sexual health and wellness. If you would like a copy sent to you by email or would like additional copies for distribution, please contact Frank Strona at Frank.Strona@sfdph.org