

Loving safely

by Dionne Faulkner

AIDS. HIV. HIV Disease. What comes to mind when you hear these words? Gay? White? Magic Johnson? It won't happen to me?

I'm sure for many of us these and other thoughts pop into our minds. But what about protecting ourselves from contracting the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or transmitting HIV to someone else if we are positive? What about supporting and caring for our sisters and brothers who are HIV-positive? Do these thoughts pop into your mind?

As we celebrate African History Month this year, it is important and necessary for us to think about HIV Disease, or AIDS, as it is commonly referred to. It is important for us, as Black people, as African people, to think about how this disease is impacting on our lives and our communities, both here in Canada and around the world. We need to know the correct information about HIV so we can then take that information and turn it into responsible and safer actions.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is *not* the same as having Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). One can have HIV (be 'HIV-positive') and not have AIDS. Let me explain. First of all, to find out if you are HIV positive, you must have an HIV antibody blood test done. This is not a regular blood test. It is one that specifically looks for HIV antibodies in your blood and you can have it done without using your name at various locations throughout Metro Toronto. (See end of article).

This test is the only way for you to know if you have the virus. You

cannot tell if someone has AIDS by looking at them.

When some has HIV Disease (AIDS), that means that their immune system (the system in the body that fights infections like a cold or the flu) has been compromised. The person has an opportunistic infection (an infection that takes advantage of a weakened immune system) that their body cannot fight off.

Someone who has HIV might not show any symptoms and could be quite healthy. Some of the symptoms which might show up include persistent fatigue, rapid weight loss, persistent cough, nausea and recurring diarrhea.

In women, however, the symptoms can be different. They include vaginal yeast infections which keep coming back and are difficult to treat, irregular periods and Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID).

I'm not saying that if you have any of these symptoms, you have HIV. What I am trying to tell you is that if you notice any of these, you should get more information by talking to your doctor, by calling us at **Black Cap (926-0122)**, or by calling an AIDS information line. Don't panic. Your symptoms could be the result of another infection so get it checked out.

HIV transmission is quite particular so you cannot contract HIV from casual contact such as shaking hands, sharing cups, forks, spoons, or having someone cough or sneeze on you.

There are four possible ways that have been determined for HIV transmission: through unprotected, unsafe sex; through the sharing of needles; through blood transfusion (but in Canada blood has been routinely screened since 1985); and in

the womb from an HIV positive woman to the child (there is only a 13-33 percent chance of this happening).

As African people, it is not enough for us to have the correct information about HIV Disease. We, my sisters and brothers, must take that information and apply it in practical terms to our lives.

We must insist to our sexual partners that we practice safer sex at all times, including talking about sex — what we like or don't like — and making sure that *condoms are used every time*. This doesn't mean "sometimes" or "only when you have been seeing someone for a short amount of time." To make sure we don't become infected or pass HIV to someone else, we have to (it is a must!) *practice safer sex always*. If you are unsure about what is or is not safe, call us at **Black CAP** and we'll be glad to help you.

Safer sex is one way of preventing transmission of HIV but we must also practice safer needle use by not sharing our "works" or needles when we inject drugs, including steroids or when we do piercing or tattooing. If you use needles, you can exchange the dirty ones for clean ones at needle exchanges throughout the city (see end of article). If you can't exchange, then clean your needles with bleach and water.

Right now, there is no cure for HIV Disease. There are, however, means of prevention and treatment for the sisters and brothers who are HIV positive.

As a community, sistren and brethren, we must take care of our own by supporting those who are HIV-positive and not denying their existence or their lives. We must affirm each other and break the silence about HIV Disease in the Black community. There are Black people who have died from HIV Disease in Toronto.

We, as a community, come from all walks of life. Some of us were born here in Canada and others were born in the Caribbean, in Africa, in South America and in other places around the world. Some of us are gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual. We speak various languages and are differently abled. With all these differences, we are still one people — Black people — African people.

Remember, when it comes to HIV Disease, it's not how you identify that puts you at risk but rather what you do and how safely you do it. All Black people's lives are important. As our motto at **Black CAP** points out: "Together we are linked in life and death through unity, strength and hope."

Dionne Faulkner is the Support and Outreach Coordinator with The Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention.

Black Coalition For AIDS Prevention

597 Parliament St., Suite 103
(South of Wellesly)
926-0122
926-0281

Anonymous Testing

Hassle Free Clinic Women 922-0566 Men 922-0603
Anishnawbe Health Clinic 360-0486 or 920-0348
Birth Control and STD Centre of North York 789-4541
Mississauga East STD Clinic 820-3663
Brampton-Caledon STD Clinic 840-1330

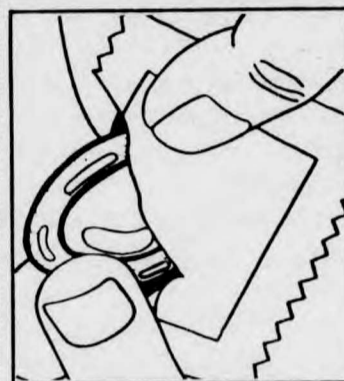
Needle Exchange

The Works 392-0520
Youth Clinical Services (North York) 742-2514
Street Outreach Services 926-0744
Anishnawbe Health Clinic 360-0486 or 920-0348
Parkdale Community Health Centre 537-2455

MAKE THEM WORK FOR YOU.

• First — always buy condoms made of latex. Rubbers made from lambskin membrane break more easily.

• Men who haven't used rubbers before can practise while jerking off before trying one in a sexual encounter with someone else. And don't give up after one try — they take a little getting used to, but it's well worth the effort.

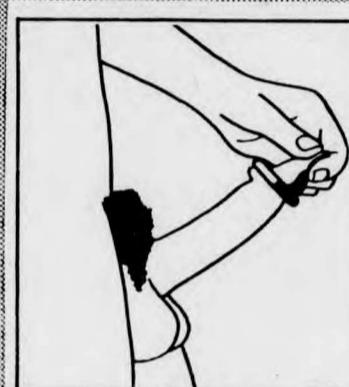


1. Open carefully.

Rough tearing or long fingernails can damage the condom.

2. Get the lube.

Make sure it's water-based (like K-Y, Lubafax, ForPlay or Muco). Don't put any on the cock — but put a drop just in the tip of the condom. This increases sensation without letting the rubber slip off.



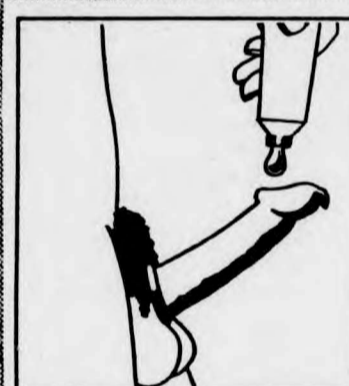
3. Place and pinch.

Put the rubber at the end of the unlubricated cock (if uncircumcised, pull back the foreskin first) and pinch out the air in the receptacle tip. This leaves a space to catch the cum. (If the condom doesn't have a receptacle tip, leave a half-inch free at the end — and make sure there's no air in it.)



4. Roll it on.

Unroll the rubber right down to the base of the cock. Smooth out any air bubbles as you do — air trapped inside a condom could make it break.



5. Lubricate.

Use lots of lube — the more slippery the rubber, the less likely it is to break or come off during sex.

Again — make sure it's water-based lube. Oil-based lubricants like Vaseline or mineral oil are out — they weaken latex and could make the condom break.



6. Afterwards...

Pull out soon after coming. Hold the rubber at the base of the cock to make sure it doesn't slip off and no cum spills out.

7. Throw the used rubber away.

You should never use a condom more than once.

And never use the same condom to have sex with more than one partner — doing that could help spread infections from one person to the other.

Complicated?

Not really.

And not at all once you get comfortable with rubbers. You and your sex partner will be more comfortable with each other, too, knowing you're taking a little care to keep each other healthy.