

# HIV & sex work

Whether you are a female, male or transgender sex worker there are many ways you can protect your sexual health and prevent HIV infection.

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## Sex work & HIV

As a sex worker, you might be more vulnerable to HIV for a number of reasons:

- ✘ you may work in an unsafe environment with increased risk of physical and sexual violence
- ✘ you may feel unable to insist on condom use
- ✘ your work may be criminalised
- ✘ you may face social stigma and discrimination
- ✘ you may have sex with a large number of people.

## Protecting yourself from HIV

### CONDOMS



Condoms are the best way to protect yourself from HIV and STIs.



Use a new condom every time you have vaginal or anal sex.



Both external (also known as male) and internal (also known as female) condoms are available giving you more ways to protect yourself and more control.



Water based lubricant helps prevent the condom breaking, especially during anal sex.



There's a small risk of HIV infection from oral sex if you have bleeding cuts or sores in your mouth. Use a condom during oral sex if this applies to you.



If a client refuses to use a condom, consider offering them alternative activities that do not involve penetrative sex such as masturbation.

## PREP

PrEP is an antiretroviral (ARV) drug for HIV-negative people at greater risk of HIV.

Taken correctly, PrEP prevents HIV infection but doesn't prevent other STIs.

PrEP isn't available everywhere, but availability is increasing. You can check with your healthcare provider if it's available where you are.

There are different ways to take PrEP. For example:

- ✔ taking one pill a day
- ✔ taking a set number of pills at set intervals before and after possible exposure to HIV (also known as On Demand or Events Based)



The most effective way for you to take PrEP will depend on whether you are male, female or trans, the type of sex you have, and how regularly you have it. Talk to your healthcare provider about what will work best for you.



## PEP

PEP is a 4-week course of ARV drugs taken after possible HIV exposure to prevent HIV infection. For example, if you have had sex with a client who doesn't know their HIV or treatment status and your condom breaks.



For treatment to be effective you must start PEP within 72 hours of possible exposure.



PEP is different to PrEP. It's taken after exposure and is not for long term use.



PEP isn't available everywhere. Check with your healthcare provider if it's available where you are.

Need more information?  
See our 'PEP' factsheet.



## REMEMBER

You can't tell who is HIV-positive and who is HIV-negative and clients may have large sexual networks that could have exposed them to HIV.



Alcohol and drugs can impair your judgement and the judgement of those around you. This can put you at greater risk.



If you use drugs, such as Viagra, to improve sexual performance make sure you know the facts about them.



## Testing for HIV & other STIs



Get tested regularly for HIV – ideally every three months.



Knowing your HIV status means you can get treatment early if you test HIV-positive. This will help you stay healthy and reduce the risk of passing the virus on.



Have regular comprehensive sexual health check-ups, even if you never have unprotected sex, as some STIs can be passed on even if you use a condom.



Having an STI can make you more vulnerable to HIV infection.

Read Avert's 'HIV & STIs' and 'HIV Testing' fact sheets for more information.



## What if I'm HIV-positive?

- ✓ Antiretroviral treatment (ART) for HIV is very effective if taken correctly. It lowers the level of virus in your body, keeping you healthy and reducing the chance of passing the virus on.
- ✓ ART can make your viral load 'undetectable'. If a health professional confirms you are undetectable this means you can't transmit HIV through sex.
- ✓ Use condoms consistently if you continue sex work. Even if you are undetectable, not using condoms could mean you get reinfected with a different strain of HIV, complicating your HIV treatment.
- ✓ HIV counselling offers support and advice about living with HIV and managing your work. Ask your healthcare provider about counselling.

## Sex work and the law

Sex work (performing sexual acts in exchange for money or goods) is criminalised in many countries. Despite this, as a sex worker you still have rights!

These include:

- ✓ the right to be free of violence and coercion
- ✓ the right to access HIV prevention, testing and treatment to protect yourself.

The law on sex work varies from country to country and different activities, people and places may be criminalised.



For example, it may be legal for one person to sell sex from a property but illegal for a group of people to do so.



In many places there are networks and organisations that offer support to sex workers. These can help you understand the law where you are. They can also connect you to HIV and sexual health services.



## Know your rights

You have the right to:

- ✓ refuse a client for any reason
- ✓ insist on using a condom
- ✓ be free from forced sex work, either by an employer, a manager or a client.