

**Burnett Foundation  
Aotearoa**

# **Why gay and bi guys are more prone to acquiring HIV**

**If you're a gay or bi guy (cis or trans), or just a guy  
hooking up with other guys, you're much more  
likely (348 times)<sup>1</sup> to acquire HIV than others.  
Ever wondered why?**





Here are three reasons why 77 percent<sup>2</sup> of HIV transmission in Aotearoa New Zealand is from sex between men:

It’s much easier to acquire HIV from anal sex

It’s been scientifically proven that receptive anal sex without protection<sup>2</sup> is 18x riskier than vaginal sex.

The cells in the ass are much more susceptible to HIV than in the vagina. Also, both semen and the lining of the anus carry more HIV than vaginal fluid. Combine these with the fact that gay and bi guys have much more anal sex than others, and you’ve got yourself a lot more risk right there.

This does not mean that tops are not at risk, because if the bottom is living with HIV, and is not undetectable, the lining of the anus can contain high amounts of HIV that can then pass into the penis.

Gay and bi guys are already over-represented in HIV diagnoses

In one NZ study, 1 in 15 gay and bi guys were found to be living with HIV. So, if you’re a guy hooking up with other guys, you’re more likely to meet someone living with HIV.

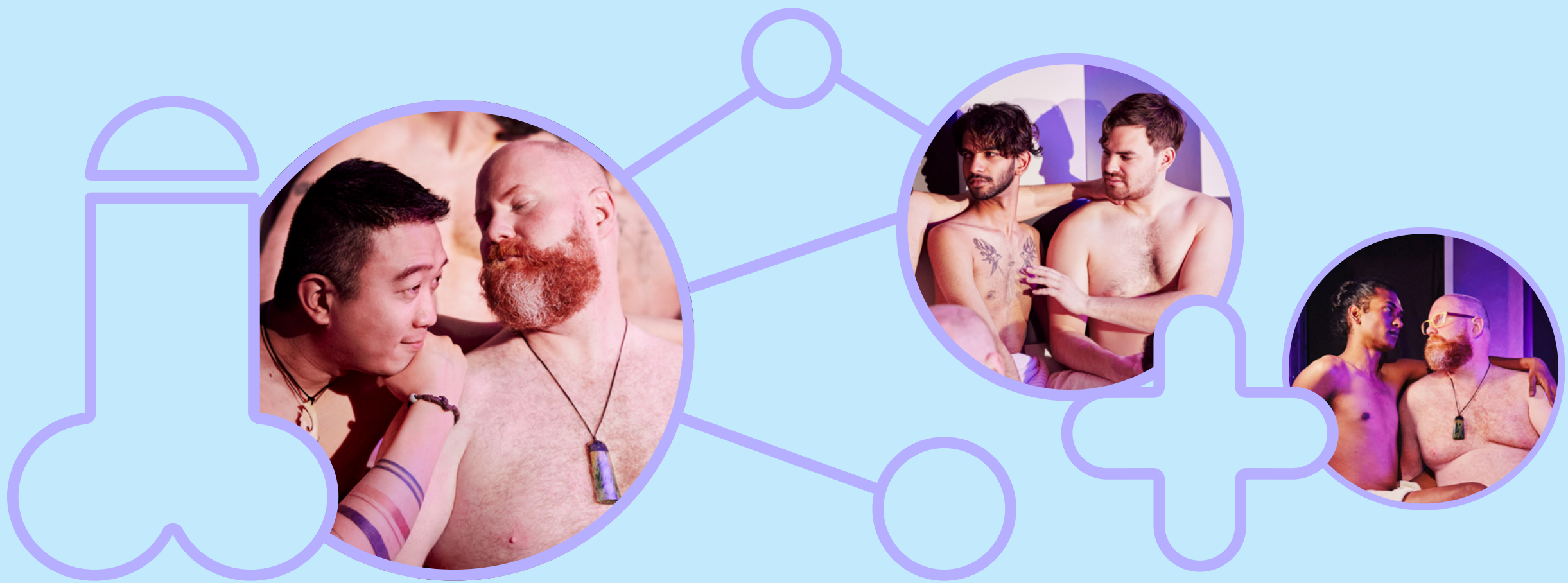
According to that same study, there’s a 20 percent chance that person with HIV doesn’t know it yet. Thankfully, testing has increased substantially since then, especially among people reporting more risky exposures, so the number of guys living with undiagnosed HIV has likely reduced.

We’re more closely connected than you might think

The reality is that there are less gay and bi guys. So when you’re meeting a guy for sex, the pool of people you have to choose from is small. This makes gay and bi guys much more closely connected, sexually, than the rest of the population. It also allows HIV and other STIs to spread quickly among us. People in these sexual networks are also at greater risk for this reason, especially if having anal sex, and this may include some trans women or non-binary people.

1. Saxton et al. Population rates of HIV, gonorrhoea and syphilis diagnoses by sexual orientation in New Zealand Sexually Transmitted Infections 2022;98:376-379.

2. AIDS Epidemiology Group, modes of acquisition for locally acquired and diagnosed HIV in New Zealand 1996-2022.”



# Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

For much of the same reasons listed in here, gay and bi guys are also more at risk of STIs. In 2023, syphilis rates were 108 times higher amongst gay and bi guys than their heterosexual peers, and rates were 44 times higher for gonorrhoea.

## Common symptoms

Syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia are amongst the most common STIs you might encounter.

Each infection will have different symptoms, or often none at all. The best way to know for sure if you have acquired an STI is to test regularly.

### Some common symptoms to watch out for include:

- Sores around the genital area
- Discharge or pain from the penis or anus
- Pain during bowel movements or when peeing
- Body rash in the genital area or around the body.

**For more information on common STIs, symptoms, testing and how to keep yourself and your sexual partners safe, visit [burnettfoundation.org.nz/stis](https://burnettfoundation.org.nz/stis)**

## DoxyPEP

DoxyPEP is a tool to help prevent STIs. It involves taking two pills of doxycycline within 72 hours after sexual activity and has been shown to reduce your chances of acquiring syphilis by 70-80% and chlamydia 70-90% (though importantly, not gonorrhoea).

## Mpox

An orthopoxvirus – like smallpox but less severe, usually transmitted through skin-to-skin contact, though it can also be transmitted through contact with skin lesions or rashes, and through the transfer of bodily fluids such as saliva.

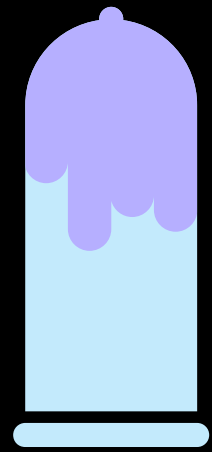
Symptoms include flu-like symptoms, a rash & pus-filled skin lesions, even something as small as pimples on your genitals.

**Getting vaccinated** is the best way to protect yourself against mpox.



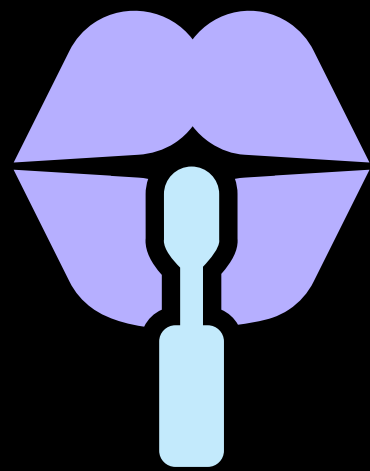


# How can you prevent HIV and STIs?



## Use condoms and lube

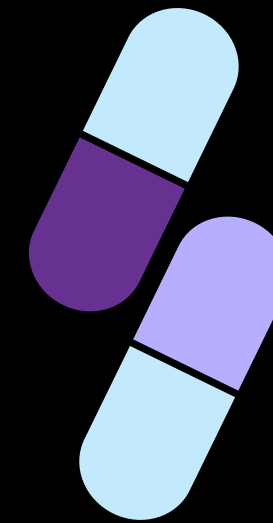
When used consistently and correctly, condoms act as a barrier that HIV cannot pass through. If you don't know your condom size go to: [whatsmyfit.co.nz](https://whatsmyfit.co.nz)



## Get tested

One in five gay and bi men living with HIV doesn't know it yet. So people who say they don't have HIV could be wrong. The more times you're having sex, the more often you should test. Knowing your HIV status means you can get access to treatment and support, as well as prevent yourself passing HIV on to others.

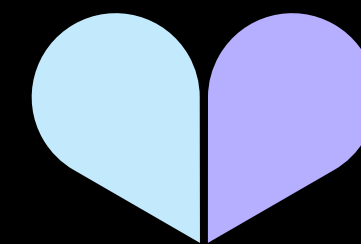
There are multiple tools available which can be combined, and in 2022, 71.4% of gay and bi guys were covered by some form of prevention.



## PrEP/PEP

PrEP is a medication you can take before sex that reduces the risk of acquiring HIV by up to 99%.

PEP means taking an emergency medicine to prevent HIV infection after a possible exposure. It needs to be taken within 72 hours after possible exposure, the sooner the better.



## U=U

An undetectable viral load is when the amount of HIV in a person's blood (their viral load) is no longer able to be detected by an HIV test. People living with HIV who are on antiretroviral treatment and maintain an undetectable viral load for at least six months have zero risk of passing it on through sex, meaning **Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)**