

Wise Women



Self-esteem and feeling whole are interconnected

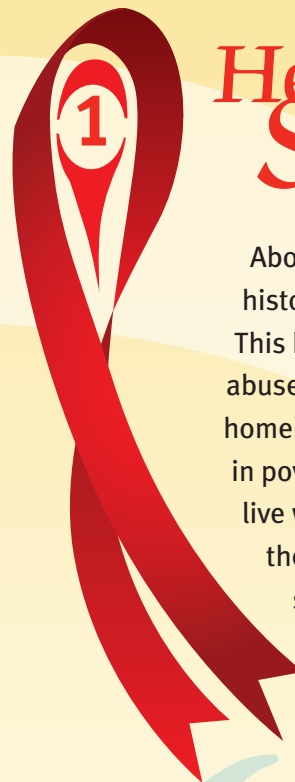
Self-esteem is a person's belief in their own self worth. It is believing in the best of ourselves. It is fed by who we are mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Healthy self-esteem starts at birth and changes and grows throughout our lives.

We may face challenges as we move toward healthy self-esteem and healthy sexuality, but it is possible to overcome those challenges by creating positive messages about ourselves and our sexuality.

Developing healthy sexuality is a life-long process

that includes healing past traumas by building healthy self-esteem, developing a positive body image, learning to communicate well, and creating trusting relationships. As women develop their own healthy sexuality, they are better able to talk about sexuality with their families and children.

It is important for women to have good sexual health information.



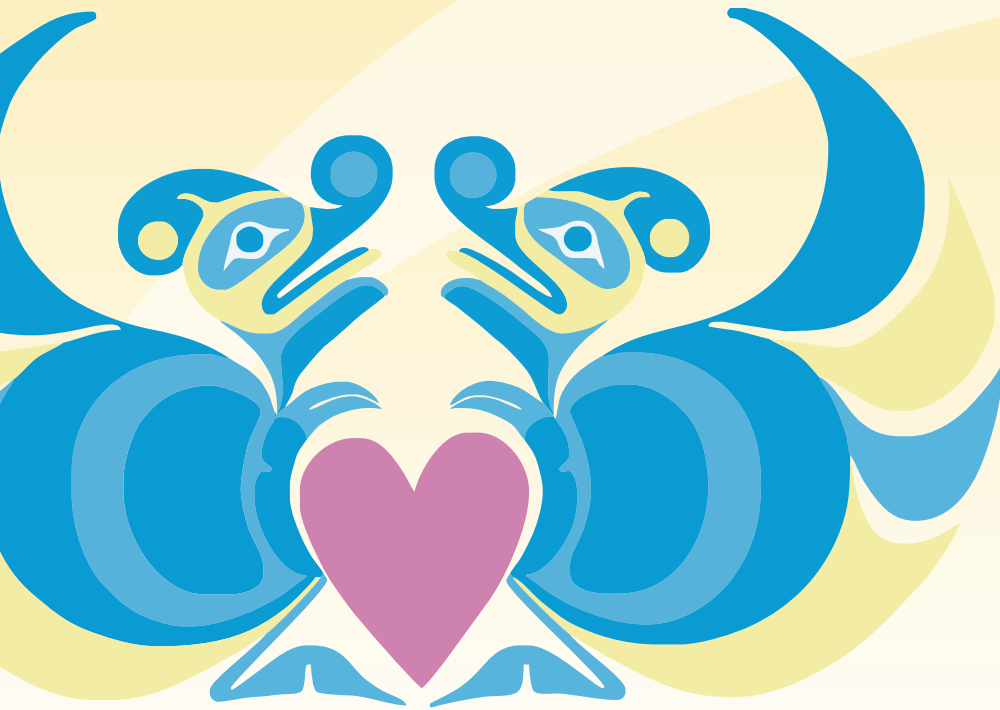
Healthy Sexuality

Aboriginal people have experienced a recent history of colonization and residential schools. This has resulted in poverty, discrimination, abuse, loss of culture, loss of identity, homelessness and addictions. People who live in poverty and experience oppression often live with poor health, which, in turn, makes them more vulnerable to HIV, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Despite these challenges, Aboriginal communities have shown great resilience and now celebrate many cultural, personal and community strengths.

*Aboriginal communities
have shown great
resilience*

*Aboriginal people
have always held
a balanced view of self,* which includes
the celebration of all human sexuality. With colonization
and residential school experiences, this perspective has
changed and many people struggle with their sexuality.



Many Aboriginal cultures have traditionally respected and honoured people who possess the sacred gifts of the female and male spirits. Today, some Aboriginal Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender people (G.L.B.T.) identify with the term “Two Spirit” to connect with these traditional teachings. In the past, Two Spirit people were highly regarded and held special roles in many communities. It is important for communities to learn and reclaim these teachings.

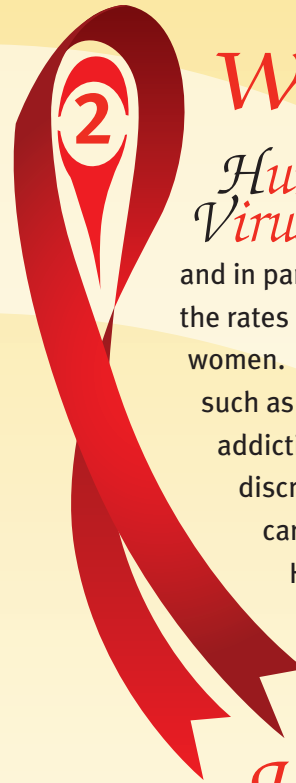
*Today, people are surrounded
by mixed messages*

about sex, body image, relationships, HIV and other STIs. Media, friends, parents, religious groups, and Aboriginal traditions all express messages about sexuality that can differ. For example, a parent may say to their child, “Wait until you are married until you have sex,” while a friend may say, “Everyone is having sex.” Messages about sexuality can often be negative. Media messages about the ideal female figure are often unrealistic and can be damaging to self-esteem. It is important for people to be aware of the effect of these messages. This awareness supports the development of healthy self-esteem and healthy sexuality.

Signs and symptoms

When a person first gets HIV, they may feel as if they have a bad case of the flu.

There may be no signs or symptoms for many years.



What is HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a concern for Aboriginal people, and in particular for Aboriginal women for whom the rates of infection are higher than non-Aboriginal women. There are various reasons for these numbers such as Aboriginal women experience poverty, addiction, sexual exploitation, violence, racism, discrimination, and often poor access to the health care system. There is a stigma that surrounds HIV in Aboriginal communities, making it hard for women to learn about it, get tested for it or receive support. Knowledge can help women deal with these issues.

*HIV is a virus
that can live only in humans*

- HIV weakens your immune system, your body's built-in defence against disease and illness.
- HIV weakens the immune system over time.
- When an immune system is weak, it has trouble fighting diseases and infections.



What is AIDS?

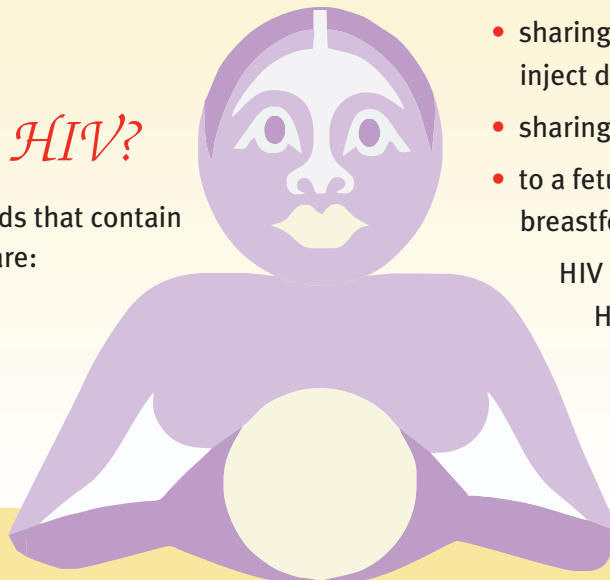
Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

- AIDS is an advanced stage of HIV infection that may occur later in the infection.
- Without HIV treatment, your immune system can become too weak to fight off serious illnesses. HIV can also damage other parts of your body. Without treatment you can eventually become sick with life-threatening infections. This is the most serious stage of HIV infection called AIDS.
- There are medications available which can help people who have HIV stay healthy longer and possibly avoid developing AIDS.
- Only a doctor or nurse practitioner can tell a person if their HIV has developed into AIDS.
- **There is no cure for HIV, but there is effective treatment. Most people with HIV can avoid getting AIDS and stay healthy for a long time.**

How do people get HIV?

In a person that has HIV, the body fluids that contain enough HIV to infect another person are:

- blood
- vaginal fluids
- breast milk
- rectal fluids
- semen/cum/pre-cum



In order to spread HIV from one person to another, these body fluids need a direct way into the bloodstream through broken skin, the opening of the penis or the wet linings of the vagina, the rectum or the foreskin.

There is a high risk of passing HIV through condomless anal and vaginal sex.

HIV can be passed from one person to another through the following activities

- anal and vaginal sex where no risk reduction barriers, like condoms, are used
- sharing needles or other equipment used to inject drugs
- sharing needles for piercing, tattooing or steroid use
- to a fetus or baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding

HIV treatment and care can prevent the spread of HIV from a parent to the baby.

HIV is not spread by mosquitoes, kissing, hugging, tears, sweat or swimming, nor through sharing cutlery, clothes or toilet seats.

Prevention

HIV is preventable. People can take steps to reduce their risk of passing or getting the virus. Here are a few things you can do:

- Use a condom with each partner for anal and vaginal sex.
- Get tested regularly for STIs. Having an STI increases the risk of getting or passing HIV and other STIs.
- HIV can be passed through sharing equipment for injecting drugs. Use new equipment every time you use.
- Use new equipment and supplies for tattoos, piercing and other body art.
- If you're already living with HIV, taking your medication as directed by your care team helps you maintain low levels of HIV in your blood (also known as an undetectable viral load). Having a low viral load reduces the chances of passing HIV.
- If you are HIV-negative and at higher risk for HIV, you might be a candidate for PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis. This involves an HIV-negative person taking certain HIV drugs every day to reduce their risk of getting HIV. Talk to your doctor to find out if PrEP might be right for you.

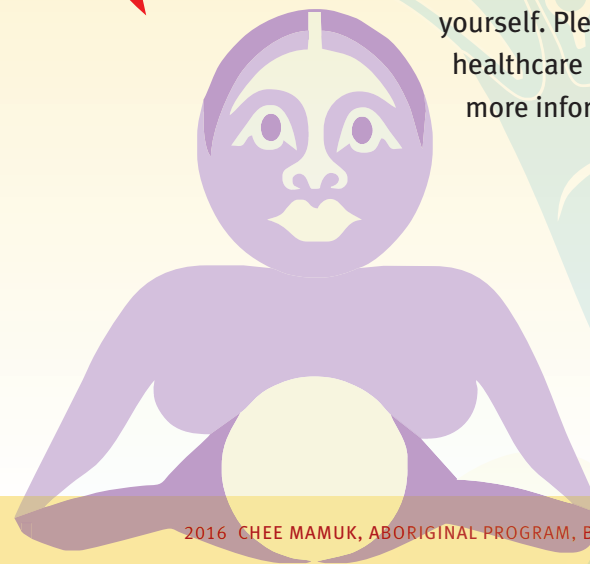


HIV Testing

The only way someone can know if they have HIV is to get tested. Talk to your nurse, doctor or service provider to find out about testing options available in your area.

*Testing is offered in
doctors' offices and some
health clinics*

Depending on which province you live in, you may be able to test without identifying yourself. Please ask your healthcare provider for more information.





Things to know if a person tests positive for HIV

A public health nurse will be available to help support the person with this new diagnosis. The nurse would work with the newly diagnosed person to help inform other people who would benefit from getting tested. This can be done by the newly diagnosed person or confidentially by the nurse or doctor.

The nurse can also refer the person to HIV support services.

*People living with HIV
need our support*

Living with HIV

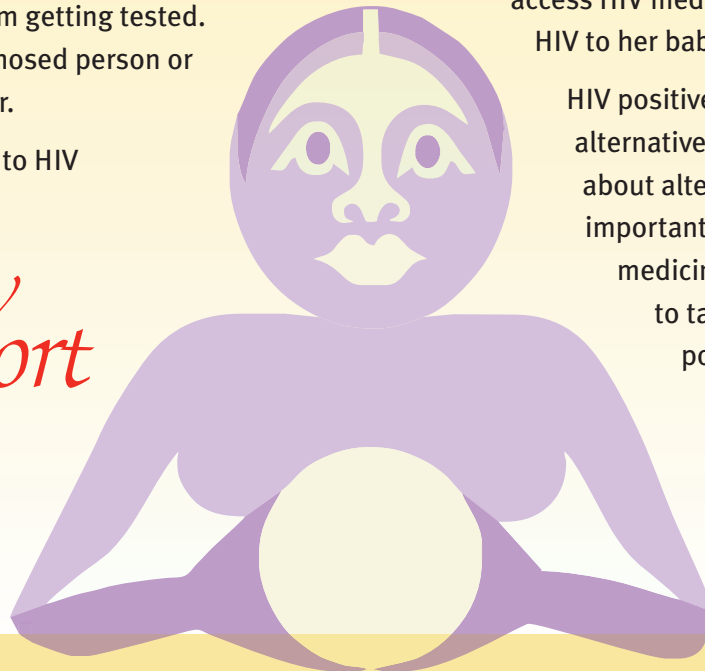
Good nutrition, rest, exercise and other stress relievers help support a healthy immune system.

There are medications called antiretroviral drugs which help people stay healthier and live longer.

These treatments are not a cure for HIV because they do not get rid of HIV from the body.

Through special programs, a woman with HIV who is pregnant or would like to plan a pregnancy can access HIV medications that help prevent passing HIV to her baby.

HIV positive women may also want to look into alternative and traditional medicines. Learning about alternative and traditional medicines is important as they can interact with Western medicines, so it is important for a woman to talk to her doctor about these possible interactions.



What about pregnancy and STIs?

It is important for women to go for STI testing during pregnancy because some STIs can be passed from mother to baby.

Syphilis can cause a baby to die during childbirth, but if a woman who is pregnant is tested and knows that she has syphilis then she can take medication to prevent the infection being passed to her baby.

HIV can pass to the baby during pregnancy, but treatment can prevent this.

How does a person prevent getting an STI?

- Condoms help protect against many STIs.
- Talk to sexual partners about STIs.
- Learn about STIs.
- Find a healthcare professional for information and testing.

Sexually Transmitted Infections



Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are passed from one person to another through intimate contact or sexual activities (e.g. oral, anal or vaginal sex, or sharing sex toys with someone who has an STI).

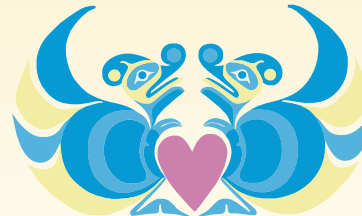
STIs used to be called Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).

STIs are very common and some are easily treated.

Common STIs include: chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, genital warts (human papillomavirus or HPV), syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis B.

It is important for women to become familiar and comfortable with their bodies so they know what is “normal” for them and can recognize when they have a symptom.

However, some women may not have any symptoms of STIs. Make regular testing a part of your check-ups.



Signs and symptoms

You can't always tell whether you have been infected with an STI by how you feel. Some people may experience symptoms including rashes, sores, a burning feeling when peeing, discharge that is different than usual or other growths and bumps.

Often an STI causes no symptoms so getting regular STI testing is important if a person is having oral, anal or vaginal sex.

What is testing like?

A nurse or doctor can do STI tests.

HIV, hepatitis and STI testing are all confidential.

When going for STI testing, some things to say might include:

"I would like STI tests."

FOR WOMEN:

"Please do swabs for STIs." And, "I would also like blood tests for STIs."

FOR MEN:

"I would like a pee test and blood tests for STIs."

A nurse or doctor will ask some personal questions to decide what kinds of tests to do.

The nurse or doctor may then do a genital (penis or vagina) exam.

Most of the time men can pee into a cup instead of swabbing the pee-hole.

It is important for men to not pee for 2 hours before their appointment.

For women it is like getting a Pap test.

The nurse or doctor may take a throat or anal swab as needed.

Some infections such as HIV, hepatitis, and syphilis are tested through blood tests.

The nurse or doctor may ask about who else needs to get tested and treated.

Going for STI testing is also a good opportunity for women to ask for their Pap test.

It is okay to ask questions and go for regular testing.

What happens if STIs are left untreated?

- Having an STI increases the risk of getting other STIs and passing STIs on to someone else.
- Undiagnosed or untreated STIs can damage the reproductive organs and lead to infertility.

The good news on treating STIs

Some STIs stay in the body for life and medication can help manage symptoms. Other STIs can be cleared completely with medication so they will not be in the body anymore.

*Most adults
who get Hep B clear it
from their body naturally*

There is treatment for people who are not able to clear Hep B from the body naturally.

Treatment does not get rid of the virus but can help a person stay healthier longer.



Hepatitis A and B

There are different types of hepatitis viruses. The common ones in Canada are Hepatitis A (Hep A), Hepatitis B (Hep B) and Hepatitis C (Hep C)

*Hep A, Hep B and
Hep C are viruses that
affect the liver*

A healthy liver:

- has over 500 different functions including clearing toxins, managing energy levels and helping with blood clotting
- is necessary for survival. It filters, sorts, stores and/or rebuilds everything a person eats, drinks, breathes, injects and rubs on their skin

Hepatitis A

Hep A is carried in fecal matter (poo).

Hep A is passed:

- when people who have Hep A go to the bathroom and don't wash their hands properly and then prepare food that others eat
- through sexual activities where fecal matter (poo) may enter the mouth
- through contaminated water, ice, seafood, fruits or vegetables, if sanitary conditions are poor

Hep A can last from a few weeks to several months. Like the flu, Hep A is naturally cleared from the body.

*There is a
vaccine
for Hepatitis A*

Hepatitis B

Most adults who get Hep B clear it from their body naturally. However, some people do not clear the virus.

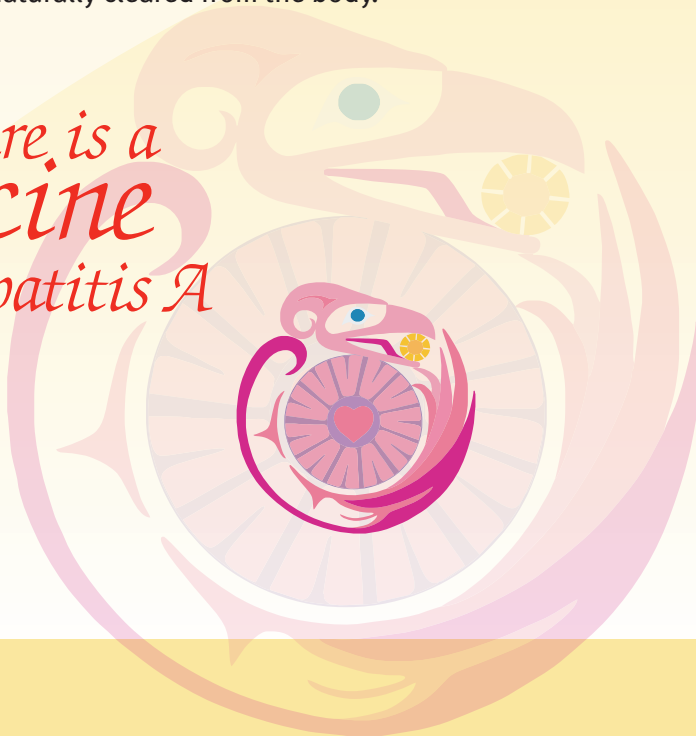
Hep B can be passed from one person to another by:

- having sex without a condom
- direct blood-to-blood contact such as by sharing needles
- passing it from mother to baby through delivery or through breastfeeding. With treatment, women with Hep B can avoid passing Hep B to their babies.

There is a vaccine that can prevent Hep B. This vaccine is offered free for:

- babies
- people who are injection drug users and their sexual partners
- people who have many sexual partners or have a recent history of a sexually transmitted disease
- males who have sexual contact with other males
- healthcare workers
- people with a chronic illness

A person can talk to their community health nurse to see if the vaccine is recommended for them.



Co-infection

- Co-infection means having more than one infection at the same time.
- For example, people can be infected with both HIV and Hep B or Hep C.
- Liver damage happens faster in people who are co-infected with HIV and Hep B or Hep C.

Even though HIV, Hep B, and Hep C are different viruses, many people who have HIV may also have hepatitis B or C because all these viruses can be passed through some of the same activities.

*Co-infection
means having more
than one infection
at the same time*



Hepatitis C

There are different strains of Hep C viruses. Most people who get Hep C keep it in their body for life unless they are cured by Hep C treatment.

Hep C can be passed through direct blood-to-blood contact such as sharing:

- needles and other drug equipment such as cookers, water or filters
- tattoo, piercing or steroid equipment
- snorting equipment such as bills or straws
- crack pipes

It is possible to pass Hep C through sharing razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers and nail files. There is a small chance a pregnant woman can pass Hep C to her baby during delivery or through cracked nipples when breastfeeding.

It is safe to live with someone who has Hep C. The virus cannot be passed through sharing food, plates, cups, forks, handshakes, hugs, kisses, coughs or toilet seats.

*People living with
Hep B and C need our
support*

Signs and symptoms

Most people do not have any symptoms while some people who get Hep C may experience a lack of energy and feel very tired even after lots of rest.

Other symptoms include nausea, vomiting, jaundice (yellow-coloured skin or eyes), poor sleep, depression, muscle and joint pain, skin rashes, hair loss, swollen hands and feet, loss of appetite, weight loss, dark urine (pee) and light-coloured stool (poo).

There is no vaccine to prevent Hep C, but there is treatment.

Hepatitis testing

- A blood test is needed to test for Hep A, Hep B and Hep C.
- Testing is offered in doctors' offices and some health clinics.

Treatment

- Most Hep C treatments have high cure rates and few side effects. Several treatments are taken for up to 12 weeks.
- A person will decide with their doctor when to start treatment.
- Even after treatment, it is possible for a person to get Hep C again through direct blood-to-blood contact.
- For some people, the medications do not work, meaning their bodies are unable to get rid of the virus.



Where to get condoms

People can get condoms from many places such as pharmacies, grocery stores, schools, health centres or gas stations.

First Nations people can get a prescription for condoms from their doctor and use it, along with their status card, at the pharmacy to select condoms. This includes male and female condoms.

Many communities offer condoms for free as well.

*Condoms are effective
in preventing HIV and
some STIs.*



How women can have
Safer Sex
and prevent
pregnancy

Birth control

- There are many ways women can help prevent pregnancy. Some examples of birth control are the Pill, patch, ring, IUD, diaphragm, external (sometimes called male) condoms and internal (sometimes called female) condoms.
- While being on “the Pill” helps prevent pregnancy, it does not prevent the spread of STIs, including HIV.
- Pregnancy or the spread of STIs may not be prevented if a man pulls out before he ejaculates or “cums.”

While condoms are very good at preventing STIs and pregnancy, they are less effective for preventing against an STI passed by skin-to-skin contact such as herpes, genital warts (HPV) and syphilis.

Things to think about when using condoms

- It can be hard for people to talk about condoms.
- It's helpful to communicate about condom use and birth control beforehand as it may be difficult in the moment.
- Planning ways of talking with new partners about condom use can help.

Healthy
sexuality
includes the use of
condoms

- Some possible ways to talk about sex and condom use are:

He says, "We already did it without a condom once."

You say, "And that was a mistake. I worried about being pregnant all month!"

He says, "I can't keep a hard-on with a condom."

You say, "I can't relax and enjoy sex without a condom.

So I'll help you stay hard."

She says, "What — a condom? Are you trying to say that I've cheated on you?"

You say, "I trust you. I use condoms because I care about you and me, and our future together."

- The more women learn to talk about sex and condom use the more strength and power they may feel.
- It is okay for women to carry condoms and keep a supply at home.

There are *external*
and *internal* condoms
to choose from



An external(male) condom can also be used:

- Over sex toys. Note that it is important to change the condom before sharing a sex toy.
- For oral sex on someone with a penis.
- For oral sex on the vagina or anus by cutting the condom open and placing over the genitals.

There are non-lubricated condoms and flavoured condoms for oral sex.

Healthy sexuality includes the use of condoms.

Women can initiate the use of condoms with their partners



Tips for using condoms

- Condoms can be used for oral, vaginal, and anal sex, and with sex toys.
- Use a new condom each time.
- When engaging in oral, vaginal, anal sex or using sex toys, change the condom in between each of these activities and between partners.
 - Store condoms at room temperature (not too hot and not too cold).
 - Store in a place that is easy to get at.
 - Keep condoms away from sharp objects and make sure the package hasn't been punctured.
 - Check the expiry date on the package.
- Always use a water-based lubricant with a condom, as oil-based lubricants can break down a condom.
- If someone has a latex allergy, they have the option to use non-latex condoms. Many brands of internal condoms are also latex free.
- Be aware of how drug and alcohol use affect decision-making around sexual activity.
- If a condom breaks, a pregnancy or STI may occur.
- The emergency contraceptive pill (ECP) or plan B, may help to prevent pregnancy and needs to be taken as soon as possible.
- If a condom breaks during sex and you are worried, talk to a nurse or doctor.

Internal (female) condoms

Internal condoms are another option a woman may use to help prevent pregnancy and the spread of STIs.

A woman can insert an internal condom up to eight hours before having sex.

HOW TO USE A FEMALE CONDOM:

- Squeeze inner condom ring to insert the condom into the vagina.
- Move inner ring high up into the vagina until it sits up against the cervix.
- The outer ring stays outside of the vagina.
- The internal condom warms up as soon as it is inserted.
- Add water-based lubricant.
- Make sure the penis is inside the condom when being put into the vagina.
- Adding more lubricant to the internal condom makes it work and feel better.
- After sex, gently twist the outer ring to make sure that no semen spills out.
- Pull out condom.
- Throw the condom away safely and do not flush it down the toilet.
- It takes time to get used to the internal condom (much like learning to use tampons).
- An internal condom is intended for one-time use only.

Other details about the internal condom

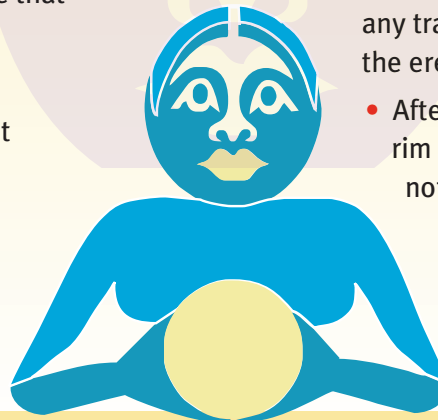
- They are made of polyurethane so even people with allergies to latex can use them.
- Internal condoms are effective and don't require using a external and internal condom at the same time. Using both at the same time can cause the condoms to rip and not work properly.
- Internal condoms can also be used for anal sex if the inner ring is removed before insertion.

External condoms

Women can also initiate the use of external condoms with their partners.

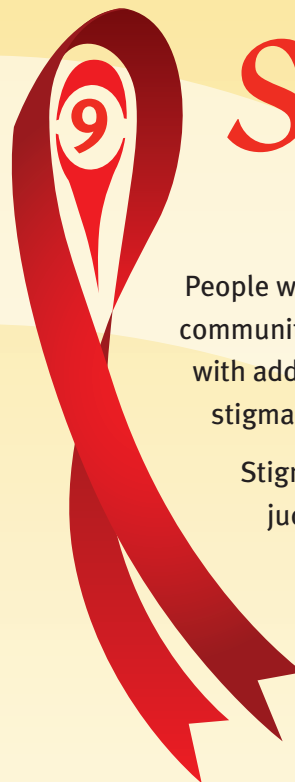
HOW TO USE AN EXTERNAL CONDOM:

- Take the condom carefully out of the package.
- Make sure that the rolled-up condom rim faces outward.
- With the other hand, pinch the tip of the condom to remove any trapped air and then unroll the condom to the base of the erect penis.
- After sex and before the penis becomes soft, hold the rim of the condom against the penis so that the semen will not spill out and then carefully pull out the penis.
- Slide the condom gently off the penis and knot the open end.
- After using the condom, throw it in the garbage.





*Access to
safer drug
equipment
helps reduce the
spread of HIV and
Hepatitis B and C*

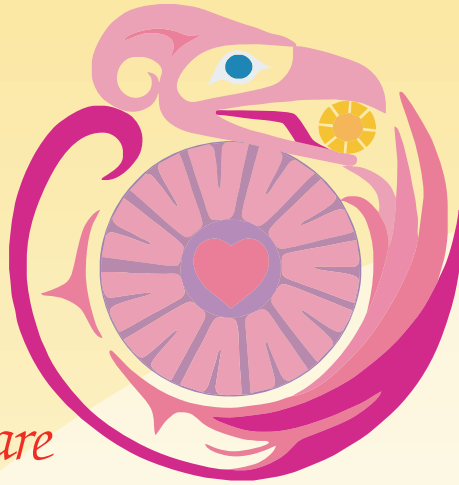


Safer drug use

People who live with addiction can be found in all communities around the world. People who live with addictions and their families often experience stigma and discrimination in their daily lives.

Stigma refers to what happens when people judge others as “bad” or “wrong” or “less than.” This leads to isolation and rejection in families, communities, and the healthcare system. When this happens, the stigma creates a barrier to health. We can all be a part of reducing this stigma and discrimination.

*Stigma
creates a barrier to
health*



*People who are
ready to stop using drugs
or alcohol may need support*

Access to safer drug equipment helps reduce the spread of HIV and Hepatitis B and C.

Sharing needles or other drug equipment is a risk for passing many infections from one person to another, including HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. Often, women are “second on the tip,” meaning they will be the second to use the same needle. Communities can keep women safer by having plenty of new needles available. Women can protect themselves by always using new equipment or not sharing their own equipment.

*People who use drugs
can protect themselves
and others by:*

- not sharing needles, water, spoons, crack pipes or snorting equipment
- having a safe place to inject
- knowing their dealers
- knowing the people they are using with
- knowing where to access clean drug equipment
- marking their rigs so that they know which is their rig
- using clean water, needles, and other equipment
- using their own mouth pieces if sharing a crack pipe
- drinking lots of water
- moisturizing the mouth
- having access to non-judgmental and supportive healthcare

*Sharing knowledge
will make our communities
healthier and stronger*



ARTWORK:

The Thunderbird's power within her heart comes from the creator and she embraces it.

The Thunderbird carries the spirit of our Earth Mother who embraces the goddess who holds the power of light.

The Raven brings light and love from the creator who speaks truth within all hearts.

Artwork by Kalaila Amia

Graphic Design by Hello Cool World



Chee Mamuk, Aboriginal Program
B.C. Centre for Disease Control
655 W 12th Ave., Vancouver B.C. V5Z 4R4
Tel: 604 707 5605 Fax: 604 707 5604
cheemamuk@bccdc.ca
www.bccdc.ca



BC Centre for Disease Control

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Thank you to Provincial Health Services Authority and to First Nations and Inuit Health for funding this initiative.



First Nations Health Authority
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(aussi disponible en français, ATI- 26372-F)

Printed with assistance from CATIE, 2011.
Updated and reprinted in 2016.