



Proud to

protect you

**A guide to sexual health for men
who have sex with men**

Four heroes

We're known as Starman, Securion, Mr. Undetectable and Mr. PrEP, and we're fighting for your health. As superheroes, our mission is to ensure that gay men and other men who have sex with men get to have the sex they want – without negative consequences.

We will explain how you can protect yourself and your sexual partners against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. We will also show you how to detect them in good time, should you nevertheless get infected, and what you can do to stay in good health.

Always by your side

Starman, Securion, Mr. Undetectable and Mr. PrEP are emissaries of the Swiss AIDS Federation supported by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. They know all there is to know about safer sex, as well as about testing and treatment.

Naturally, you are the only one who can take your well-being into your own hands. Take the information provided in this brochure and make a good use of it.



Starman



Mr. Undetectable



Securion



Mr. PrEP

Contents

6 – 11 About this brochure

12 – 23 Part 1: sex and risks

- 1.1 The principal infections and their transmission routes
- 1.2 Ignorance and sex
- 1.3 Mental health and sex
- 1.4 Alcohol / drugs and sex

24 – 39 Part 2: Avoiding HIV, dealing properly with other sexually transmitted infections

- 2.1 Condoms
- 2.2 HIV Treatment
- 2.3 PrEP
- 2.4 PEP
- 2.5 Testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- 2.6 Key points at a glance

40 – 45 **Part 3: The Urgent Action Plan**

- 3.1 For better sexual health
- 3.2 Key action areas of the Urgent Action Plan

46 – 52 **Additional information: symptoms, infections, the principal links**

- 1 Symptoms of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- 2 The principal sexually transmitted infections
 - HIV – human immunodeficiency virus
 - HPV – human papilloma virus
 - Syphilis
 - Gonorrhoea
 - Chlamydia
 - LGV – Lymphogranuloma venereum
 - Hepatitis A and B
 - Hepatitis C
- 3 III Addresses for information, counselling, testing and treatment

A concise overview for men who have sex with men.

This brochure is intended for all men who have sex with men (MSM). This includes gay and bisexual men as well as trans* men or straight men who occasionally have same-sex encounters.

For the sake of simplicity, however, this brochure mostly just uses the term “gay men”.

The brochure gives an updated overview of:

- the risks of getting infected with HIV and/or other sexually transmitted infections during sex;
- factors that can increase these risks;
- ways to reduce the risks and avoid negative consequences to your health.

This brochure focuses mainly on HIV infection. HIV cannot be cured, but it is fairly easy to prevent transmission. There are nowadays more ways of doing this than just a few years ago. For instance, safer sex has more options than only sex with a condom. PrEP (HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis) also prevents HIV infection. The same applies to having sex with a man who is HIV positive but who is undergoing HIV treatment and has an undetectable viral load in his blood.

It is exactly the opposite with other sexually transmitted infections, most of which cannot be as easily prevented as HIV. Yet they can be cured. This brochure provides the necessary information about them as well.

For both HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, however, early detection and treatment are crucial. In both cases, serious complications can be avoided and further infection prevented that way.

Having sex and avoiding HIV transmission

It is possible to lead an active sex life according to your own preferences and reliably avoid HIV infection. But this requires that you know how to prevent HIV transmission.

Condoms

Condoms are still the cheapest means of protection. (→ page 25)

PrEP

In certain circumstances, an HIV-negative man can take HIV medication prophylactically in order to avoid HIV infection. (→ page 29)

HIV treatment

Effective treatment prevents HIV-positive men from passing on HIV to others during sex. (→ page 27)

HIV testing

If both sexual partners are HIV negative, there is no possibility of transmitting HIV. Only an HIV test can show with certainty whether you are HIV negative. (→ page 36)

PEP

PEP is not an actual protective strategy but an emergency treatment. It can prevent HIV infection if you start it within hours after having unprotected high-risk sex. (→ page 34)

Dealing properly with sexually transmitted infections

Protection against most other sexually transmitted infections is far more difficult than against HIV. Even though condoms also provide a certain amount of protection, many infections are transmitted more easily than HIV – contact with inflamed skin or mucous membrane not covered by a condom is often enough.

It is important to detect such infections at an early stage as they usually respond well to treatment.

There are steps you can take to prevent any health consequences from sexually transmitted infections:

Vaccination

Vaccinations against hepatitis A and B and against HPV (which can lead to genital warts or anal cancer (and/or cervical cancer regarding trans* men) are available.

Recognising symptoms

Many sexually transmitted infections cause similar symptoms (→ page 47).

Testing

There are often no symptoms for a long time after infection. For sexually active men, it makes sense to get tested at least once a year (or at the latest after every 10 sexual partners) (→ page 36).

Treatment

Most sexually transmitted infections can be treated to the point that the pathogens disappear entirely. It is important to get medical treatment as soon as possible, as some sexually transmitted infections can lead to health problems in the long term. HIV, on the other hand, cannot be cured. HIV-positive people are on treatment for a lifetime.

Knowledge is crucial in order to be empowered with your own health

There are many ways to avoid HIV transmission. And it is easy to detect and treat sexually transmitted infections in good time. But both require some knowledge and sometimes a bit of preparation. In short, you need to know the score. And be aware of what you're doing.

With this brochure, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (SFOPH) and the Swiss AIDS Federation (AHS) present current developments honestly and clearly.

Knowing and doing aren't always the same thing

Knowledge is important, but it's not everything. Various factors can cause you to ignore what you know and take risks. For instance, social pressure to have unprotected sex. Or strong feelings (e.g. infatuation or rage). Or if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or are affected by mental health issues (e.g. depression).

That is why this brochure addresses the consumption of alcohol and illegal substances as well as mental health. It shows how you can take care of your health and reduce risks with regard to these topics too.

Personal empowerment is required, as are the right health facilities

The information in this brochure helps you take responsibility for your sexual health, individually and independently. For this to happen, however, the right framework conditions are needed as well. It is the task and goal of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health and the Swiss AIDS Federation to create those.

An important part of these framework conditions are targeted medical facilities such as the Checkpoint health centres (in Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich), but also raising the awareness of the entire healthcare system about the concerns of gay men.

Action plan to promote our sexual health

The Swiss Federal Office of Public Health and the Swiss AIDS Federation are also implementing an action plan that will help ensure that sex among men has minimal negative consequences. Three action areas are key:

1. We want to prevent HIV transmission during the most infectious phase (the primary infection phase).
2. We want to detect HIV and other sexually transmitted infections at an early stage through targeted testing.
3. We want to motivate men with a positive HIV diagnosis to start their treatment at an early stage in order to protect their health and prevent further transmission.

The last chapter of this brochure explains the detailed considerations behind this action plan.

Be aware!

Get tested, even if you feel totally fine.
drgay.ch/starman



Know the risks and stay one step ahead.

Nobody wants to worry about diseases while having sex. And you don't have to, if you are well-informed. Learn the principal risks, then you can act in an informed fashion and enjoy carefree sex.

1.1 The principal infections and their transmission routes

The Big 5 – the five principal sexually transmitted infections

Many pathogens are sexually transmitted. Around twenty infections can be sexually transmitted. But this brochure only covers the five that are particularly common and potentially harmful. These so-called Big 5 include HIV, syphilis, gonorrhoea (clap), chlamydia and hepatitis.

Basic information on the Big 5 can be found on page 48. Page 47 describes the principal symptoms of sexually transmitted infections.

You never know your risk exactly...

The exact likelihood of contracting HIV or another sexually transmitted infection from a specific sexual contact can't be known. Many factors play a role, for example the type and quantity of pathogens transmitted.

...but you can roughly estimate it

The risks are nonetheless really quite straightforward, as they mostly depend on sexual behaviour. The following overview shows the routes of STI transmission during unprotected sex:

Transmissions through exchanging bodily fluids (semen, blood)

HIV is found in blood, semen as well as anal and vaginal fluids. Syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia, on the other hand, are not tied to these bodily fluids. They are transmitted by contact with mucous membrane (see below). The hepatitis B virus can be transmitted through all bodily fluids (including blood and semen). The hepatitis C virus, however, is primarily transmitted through infected blood. During sex, you can come in contact with blood in certain situations or with certain practices, such as chemsex, fisting or sharing sex toys.

Sexual practices:

- Anal sex, with and without ejaculation: HIV and other sexually transmitted infections can be transmitted in both directions (active and passive partners).
- Vaginal sex with trans* men, with and without ejaculation: HIV and other sexually transmitted infections can be transmitted in both directions (active and passive partners).
- In the case of hepatitis B and C, the principal transmission paths besides anal sex include the sharing of syringes (see page 21 and 22), straws (sniffing), fisting (fist-fucking) and the shared use of sex toys.

Transmissions through intensive mucous membrane contact

Mucous membrane can also contain high concentrations of pathogens. Intensive contact between mucous membranes (especially penile, vaginal, anal and oral mucosa) drastically facilitates the transmission of bacterial infections such as syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia but also viral infections such as HPV or herpes.

Sexual practices:

- Anal sex, with or without ejaculation: relevant pathogens can be transmitted in both directions (active and passive partners).
- Vaginal sex with trans* men, with and without ejaculation: relevant pathogens can be transmitted in both directions (active and passive partners).
- Blowjobs, with and without ejaculation: You can't contract HIV through receiving a blowjob. Giving a blowjob exposes you to only an extremely low risk of contracting HIV and then only if large amounts of semen get in your mouth. The risk is so low that post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP, see page 34) is generally not recommended. Other sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis or gonorrhoea can, however, be transmitted in both directions.
- Rimming is a safe practice as far as HIV is concerned, but it's a common way of contracting gonorrhoea and herpes. Syphilis and chlamydia can also be transmitted this way, especially to the person doing the licking.
- Cunnilingus during sex with trans* men: this practice is safe as far as HIV is concerned, but it's a common way of contracting herpes. Syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia can also be transmitted, especially to the person doing the licking.

Smear infection

Some pathogens are also transmitted by first getting onto body parts (e.g. fingers) or objects (e.g. dildos) and immediately afterwards coming in close contact with mucous membranes. This can be the case, for example, when masturbating together, during foreplay or if several men are sharing sex toys during group sex. Gonorrhoea, chlamydia, herpes and genital warts can be transmitted this way. It is also possible to contract hepatitis B and C if there is blood, for example on sex toys, fists/gloves, penis/condoms or anal douches.

Principal practices:

- dildo games
- finger games
- fisting

1.2 Ignorance and sex

The information is out there – for everyone

To protect yourself during sex, you have to know the risks and how to deal with them. If you're knowledgeable, you can make informed decisions.

It goes without saying that you can never know everything. But it is very easy to find out specific information, including the possible consequences of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, which sexual practices are at risk, and what preventive options are available.

If you want a clear answer, get tested

Knowing your HIV status gives you a clear advantage as you can start treatment at an early stage. This prevents the infection from progressing to AIDS and makes an enormous difference in terms of increased life expectancy. In addition, if you are HIV positive and undergoing successful HIV treatment, you will no longer pass on the virus, even if you don't use condoms during sex (see page 27).

In fact, HIV-positive people under successful treatment are not involved in spreading the virus. On the other hand, it is particularly common for men who have been infected relatively recently, who have not been tested and are unaware of their HIV status to pass the virus on to others. They are in what is known as the primary infection stage, the phase shortly after HIV transmission when the viral load in the blood is particularly high for several weeks.

Knowing your HIV status is advisable both for the benefit of your own health as well as to protect others. An HIV test provides insight. It can be done quickly and easily, for example at a Checkpoint centre (→ www.mycheckpoint.ch).

Tests for other sexually transmitted infections are equally important, not only when you feel itching or burning. Many infections are asymptomatic for a long time while they insidiously cause harm, sometimes with serious long-term effects. As a general rule, the sooner you get treated, the better. This means that if you are sexually active, you should get tested every so often – even if you don't notice any signs of illness.

Most importantly: Talk to each other!

It is safe to have sex with an HIV-positive man without a condom and without taking PrEP (see page 29) if he is undergoing successful HIV treatment. However, not using condoms or PrEP during sex with a man who's unaware of his HIV status constitutes unprotected, i.e. high-risk sex.

Personal risk management thus depends, on the one hand, on information you can get by reading but also on things that you only learn through talking to each other. That is why it is important for sexual partners to communicate openly. It's not always easy, and it certainly helps if you are yourself forthcoming.

The same applies when dealing with medical professionals such as doctors. These people are sometimes crucial for maintaining your sexual health. But in order for them to make the right decisions – for example, whether a specific test or protective measure such as PrEP is advisable or not – they also need you to be open with them. Even just knowing that you have sex with other men can help your doctor clarify certain topics in a more targeted manner.

#undetectable
HIV-positive.
Non-infectious

People with HIV who are undergoing successful treatment are not infectious. For more information, go to drgay.ch/undetectable



1.3 Mental health and sex

Sex starts in the mind. So does health.

Sex and the psyche can influence each other. This interaction results sometimes into difficulties for some gay men. Gay men suffer from mental issues at higher rates than the general population, which can have an impact on their behaviour and protection strategy.

Several studies have shown this in recent years, even if they were unable to show exactly which psychological processes are at play. To a large extent, the simple explanation is that, in case of depression, people sometimes simply do not care about their own health for long periods of time. Mental health problems are also often accompanied by excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs (see also page 21). Health problems can cumulate and reinforce each other, which can lead to sexual health being neglected.

Mental health suffering among gay men is often the result of societal factors

But why do gay men suffer from depression and other mental stress at higher rates? An important and oft-described reason is “minority stress”. People belonging to a minority may frequently experience rejection, discrimination and exclusion. Over time, this relentless strain leaves its mark on the psyche.

Many gay men also adopt a pejorative view of their own homosexuality from a homophobic environment – what is referred to as “internalised homonegativity”. This usually occurs long before they come out. Especially at a young age, it is often compounded by uncertainty about their sexual identity and the added fear of being found out. These experiences can have a huge impact and become a major burden.



But it would be too easy to see the cause as lying solely in a homophobic environment. For discrimination can also be found within the gay community. For example, huge pressure can result from trying to meet certain ideals of beauty that apply in the gay scene.

Whether within or outside the gay community, these social phenomena often put gay men under enormous psychological pressure. And it is one of the aims of the Swiss AIDS Federation in collaboration with the SFOPH to change them (see page 45).

How you deal with the pressure is crucial

If handling the causes of mental stress is often difficult, one can learn how to deal with it. The first step is recognising that you are at risk or already affected. This requires honesty and a critical look at yourself. Knowing yourself allows you to develop your own strengths and your ability to increase your powers of resilience.

Help yourself or get help

Sometimes it is the simple things that are extremely important for a good state of mind: cultivating your social life, relaxing, acting responsible for yourself. This includes seeking help when you need it. There are good professional facilities. The Checkpoint gay health centres offer targeted support in crisis situations.

It always makes sense to deal proactively and consciously with psychological stress. Waiting passively hardly ever solves problems and is much more likely to increasingly impact your quality of life. It makes more sense to get professional support when one faces a difficult situation.

1.4 Alcohol / drugs and sex

The phenomenon of sex on drugs is as old as it is widespread

From alcohol to crystal meth – many substances can facilitate, intensify or prolong sexual encounters. That is why drugs and sex have long been combined by many people with the aim of enhancing sex.

Yet intoxication can also mean that you are no longer capable of protecting yourself as planned. And in the case of some substances, the mode of consumption itself may represent a transmission risk, as is the case with shared syringes and sniffing straws.

If you are worried about your drug use, you can get advice and help at the Checkpoint centres. It is often easy to find a safer way of using drugs with minimum effort.

Alcohol is the most common drug – including before sex

Alcohol is by far the most commonly consumed drug before sex. This is no different among gays than in the general population. The disinhibiting effect of alcohol makes it easier for many people to approach other people and meet possible sexual partners in the first place.

But when consumed in larger quantities, alcohol becomes problematic, because it has a major impact on one's perception of risks, and the willingness to take those risks. Studies show that many gay men regularly consume a lot of alcohol when going out, and then take more risks during sex than they actually want to. Excessive alcohol also prevents them from maintaining an erection.

Chemsex can pose a challenge to prevention strategies

“Chemsex” is the term used for sex under the influence of synthetic drugs. Chemsex users usually meet up for it through dating apps (such as Grindr). Chemsex often takes place at private sex parties, which can go on for several days and involve sex with various partners. The most commonly consumed substances at these parties are GHB/ GBL, crystal meth (methamphetamine), ketamine and mephedrone.

At chemsex parties, it can be difficult to apply a protective strategy. Often several substances are combined, including Viagra, in order to have sex for a very long time at one stretch. Using condoms implies having to change it with every new partner. Depending on the setting, the sexual arousal and the influence of the drugs often lead to neglect the systematic use of condoms. If you attend chemsex parties, you should get advice on PrEP at a Checkpoint gay health centre.

Intravenous use of those substances (“slamming”) and the sharing of syringes entail a particular risk of transmitting HIV and hepatitis B and C. Shared sniffing straws can increase the risk of hepatitis B and C transmission.

Going in for chemsex?

Look into it first!

Doing drugs or chemsex does not imply not taking care of your health. In order to do that, one should reflect on its drug use, its sexual desires and its current mental and physical state. And, ideally, prepare oneself knowingly.

This includes obtaining high-quality drugs from reliable sources and always using new syringes or sniffing straws (safer use). There are places where you can have your drugs tested for free. You should also prepare your protection during sex so that it can actually be applied at a chemsex party.

You can also find out which substances can be combined and how, as sometimes there are dangerous interactions, such as between GHB/GBL and alcohol. If you are HIV positive, you should also find out whether your HIV medication is compatible with certain drugs, as adverse effects are possible in that respect as well.

Useful internet links:

- Overview of the main substances, their effects, dosage, etc.:
www.know-drugs.ch
- Overview of interactions between HIV medications and drugs
www.hiv-druginteractions.org/checker
- Drug checking:
www.infodrog.ch/drug-checking.html
- Party drugs:
www.saferparty.ch

Stay healthy – before, during and after sex:

You can protect yourself very reliably against HIV and various other sexually transmitted infections. There are even vaccinations against some. With certain infections, however, reliable protection is more difficult.

But whether it's HIV or any other infections, the same rule applies: you can get tested, and it is absolutely essential that you do so. Even if you have contracted HIV, there are now drugs that will allow you to have a long life. The other infections can be cured outright and the consequences avoided entirely – provided you act promptly. So remember to take care of your health before sex, during sex and after sex. This chapter shows you how.

2.1 Condoms

Condoms are still the best solution for many men

Condoms were the first means of protection against HIV during sex. And they are still the cheapest and simplest way to protect yourself. They also provide some degree of protection against other sexually transmitted infections – albeit much less, as most infections can also be transmitted through smear infection or oral sex and rimming.

A major advantage of condoms is that they can be used spontaneously, unlike PrEP, which requires preparation. Assuming, of course, that a condom is to hand or can be obtained quickly.

Condoms only provide protection if used correctly

The benefit of condoms does, however, depend on their correct usage. While this may sound obvious. Yet it is not as simple as it might sound, as application errors are not uncommon. A little practice is required to put on a condom quickly and safely, even at the height of passion. And make sure it

stays in place. Another important and easy step simply consists in having condoms to hand that fit. It might also be necessary to try out different condoms. For more information on condoms, go to www.mysize.ch.

Condoms are generally very robust. There are, however, a few things to bear in mind:

- Do not use condoms after their expiry date (printed on the wrapper).
- Only use condoms with silicone-based or water-based lubricant (no baby creams, Vaseline or the like).
- Store condoms in a way to ensure the packaging cannot be damaged.
- Never use two condoms, one on top of the other. Double-bagging makes them more likely to slip off, and the friction can cause them to rip or tear.
- In group sex, always use a new condom for each partner

If a condom mishap occurs (condom tears, slips off, etc.), this constitutes unprotected sex if you are not taking PrEP. In such a situation, it is important to determine the need for HIV emergency treatment (PEP) (see page 34).

And if you find it difficult to use condoms?

Condoms are cheap and practical. Yet some men find it difficult to use condoms. For them, PrEP might be an alternative (see page 29). If you are unsure about the right protective strategy, you can get advice at a Checkpoint.

Protect yourself against HIV!

You can find all testing centres
and important information at
drgay.ch/securion



2.2 HIV treatment

HIV-positive persons undergoing effective HIV treatment are no longer infectious

Persons with HIV whose HIV treatment is effective will no longer pass on the virus through sex. HIV treatment is thus crucial not only to the physical well-being of HIV-positive persons but also for their mental health: it is extremely important to people with HIV to know that they are not infectious to others.

And finally, HIV treatment also has positive consequences for prevention. Successful HIV treatment allows you to have anal and vaginal sex without a condom, without any HIV risk. HIV treatment does not, however, prevent you from contracting other sexually transmitted infections or passing them on to others.

When is HIV treatment successful?

The drugs used in HIV treatment stop any proliferation of the human immunodeficiency virus. Patients undergoing successful treatment therefore have such low levels of the virus in their blood, semen and anal mucosa (and vaginal mucosa in the case of trans* men) that it is no longer detectable with the usual blood screening. This is then referred to as an undetectable viral load. Once this is achieved, persons with HIV are no longer infectious. This is the case for the vast majority of HIV patients in Switzerland.

HIV-positive men are not infectious subject to the following conditions:

1. Regular intake of HIV medication (as prescribed by a doctor)
2. Regular blood tests (generally every three to six months) in order to monitor the viral load

The effect is lasting and stable

The protection provided by treatment is stable. This means that there are no unexpected fluctuations in viral load. Even if you forget to take your HIV medication once, you will not immediately become infectious again. With longer and more frequent lapses, however, caution is advised, and you should check your viral load again before having sex without a condom.

Until just a few years ago, it was assumed that other sexually transmitted infections may affect the risk of HIV transmission when undergoing successful treatment. We now know that this is not the case.

HIV-negative men are responsible for their own protection

Sex with an HIV-positive man undergoing effective HIV treatment constitutes safer sex. In Switzerland, most HIV-positive persons are undergoing effective treatment. But this does not mean that all HIV-positive men are being treated, for many aren't aware of their HIV infection. Which is why, when having sex with men whose status is not known, you should use a condom or take PrEP.

2.3 PrEP

HIV medication protects HIV-negative persons against infection

PrEP is a new way of protecting against HIV. “PrEP” stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis: HIV-negative men take medication as a precautionary measure to protect against an HIV infection. As far as protective strategies go, this is rather complex and expensive, plus it requires medical counselling and testing. But PrEP can be a very effective solution for men with a high risk of HIV infection. PrEP does not, however, protect against other sexually transmitted infections.

To date, there are only two active ingredients that have been shown to prevent HIV infection when combined: tenofovir and emtricitabine. Both of them are also used for HIV treatment. This usage is reimbursed by health insurance. But PrEP, although available, is not reimbursed, as the combination of tenofovir and emtricitabine is not yet registered in Switzerland for that indication. This means that in Switzerland the cost of PrEP is borne by the insured themselves.

I'm on PrEP!
I protect myself
the way I want.
All you have to know about PrEP.
myprep.ch



No PrEP without medical supervision

If you think PrEP might be an option for you, you should contact an HIV specialist, for example at a Checkpoint centre or a university hospital. The Federal Commission for Sexual Health (FCSH) has published guidelines on the correct use of PrEP, which requires medical supervision. This includes an HIV test to determine whether an HIV infection might already be present – in which case, taking tenofovir and emtricitabine alone would not be advisable, as the viral load might continue to increase and the active substances could no longer be used for an HIV treatment. Your doctor will also determine whether you are susceptible to certain side effects and, later, check your HIV status and PrEP tolerance.

Regardless of whether you buy the medication online, in a pharmacy or from a doctor, PrEP usage must be examined and supervised by a doctor.

There are two types of PrEP that are suitable for different needs

At the time of this brochure's publication (November 2018), two PrEP options have proved to be effective:

1. Daily PrEP

This model is suitable if you want to maintain protection from PrEP over a longer period because you have regularly sex with men whose HIV status is unknown. This can be, for instance, over a period of one year or three weeks if you go on holiday (this is then referred to as "holiday PrEP").

Daily PrEP is initiated seven days before any sexual contact where it is intended to provide protection. It involves taking a pill containing tenofovir and emtricitabine every day. Throughout PrEP, you continue to take one pill daily. PrEP can then be discontinued seven days after the last sexual contact that required protection. During the seven days of initiation and interruption, make sure to protect yourself with a condom.

2. On-demand PrEP

On-demand PrEP is suitable when you want to protect yourself for a specific occasion but do not have regular sex with men whose HIV status is unknown.

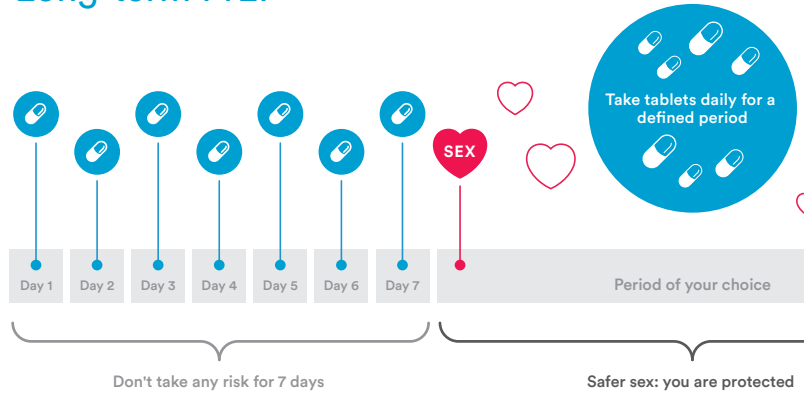
You start on-demand PrEP by taking two pills between 24 and 2 hours before a sexual contact where it is intended to provide protection. For the entire duration of the PrEP (generally a few days or even just one) you then continue taking one pill daily. You can discontinue PrEP two days after the last sexual contact that required protection. With on-demand PrEP (in contrast to daily PrEP) it is very important to take the pill at the exact same time every day (+/- 2 hours). This is the only way to ensure that the blood contains the right amount of active ingredients. Make sure you protect yourself with a condom when discontinuing PrEP. On-demand PrEP is not valid for vaginal sex (trans* men).

Whether it's daily PrEP or on-demand PrEP

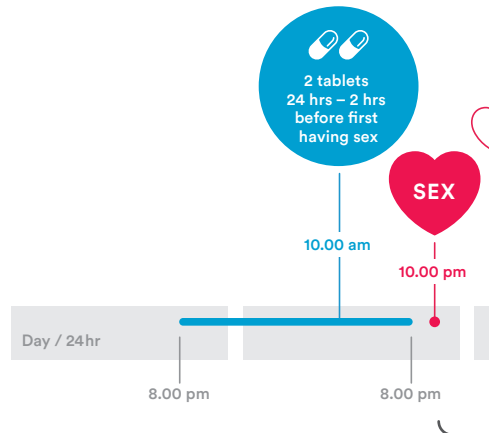
In both cases, the success of PrEP depends on taking it as prescribed by your doctor. If used correctly, PrEP provides the same level of protection against HIV as a condom.

Given the great deal of research that is being done in the field of HIV medicine, it is quite possible that further active substances for PrEP will be approved in the coming years and additional types of PrEP will be added.

Long-term PrEP

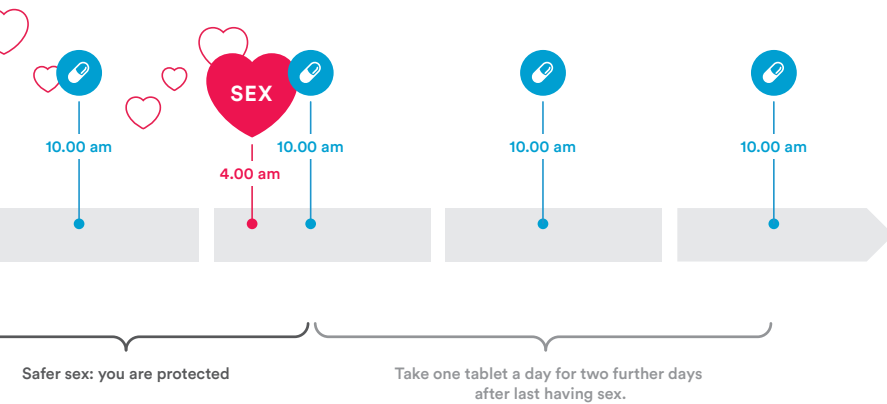


On-demand PrEP



Take the tablet at the same time each day, +/- 2 hrs

Part 2: Avoiding HIV, dealing properly with other sexually transmitted infections



2.4 PEP

In an emergency, PEP can prevent HIV infection

PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) is not a protective strategy but an emergency treatment. It provides a good chance of preventing HIV infection even if the virus has already been transmitted during unprotected sex. But this requires starting PEP within a few hours after such an event – the sooner, the better.

Whether PEP makes sense depends on the risk taken:

- PEP is recommended after unprotected anal/vaginal sex (without a condom and without PrEP) with a man or trans* man whose HIV status is not known.
- PEP is recommended after unprotected anal/vaginal sex with an HIV-positive man or trans* man who is not undergoing HIV treatment.

Every minute counts

If PEP is needed, the time factor is crucial. The chances of being able to avoid an HIV infection start to decrease as early as 6 to 8 hours after transmission. After 48 hours at the latest, PEP no longer makes any sense.

That is why PEP is an emergency treatment, and it is absolutely crucial to contact a PEP emergency service immediately (addresses and telephone numbers at www.drgray.ch → Test- und Beratungsstellen → PEP). In countries where there are no PEP emergency services, it is best to contact the general emergency medical service. Generally speaking, if you wait for a doctor's appointment and then for a referral to a specialist, it will definitely be too late.

PEP can be prescribed by doctors only. If your doctor considers it necessary, the costs for examination and treatment are borne (in Switzerland) by your health insurance. Depending on your deductible, however, you may still be responsible for a considerable amount (maximum CHF 2500, minimum CHF 300).

PEP efficacy depends on consistent application

PEP is basically a standard HIV treatment, but one that is taken only for four weeks. In order for PEP to work, it is important to take the HIV medication as prescribed by your doctor.

During PEP, the doctor measures various blood counts in order to be able to react to possible side effects. The treatment also includes an HIV test at the start of PEP and six weeks after the HIV risk situation. Only then can you be sure to still be HIV negative.

2.5 Testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections

Knowing your status gives you a clear advantage

For both HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, early detection is crucial. In the case of HIV, treatment can prevent the infection from progressing. Most sexually transmitted infections can be cured. Testing and where necessary subsequent treatment not only protect your own health but also prevent infections from spreading.

Testing is important, but it does not provide protection

Testing is not a protective strategy, of course. Having unprotected sex and then getting tested does not prevent infections. Regular testing for the principal sexually transmitted infections serves to establish whether you have been infected with a pathogen despite careful protection.

The Swiss AIDS Federation and the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health therefore recommend regular testing for HIV, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. If you are sexually active outside a monogamous relationship, you should certainly do this once a year; if you have more than ten sexual partners in a given year, at least twice a year. Vaccination against hepatitis A and B is also recommended. If you don't know whether you have already been effectively vaccinated, you can have your vaccination protection checked with a test.

If you have started a new partnership, have had unprotected anal/vaginal intercourse (no condom and no PrEP) or notice symptoms (the most common symptoms are described on page 47), make sure to get tested rapidly

HIV home tests belong to the 3rd generation of HIV rapid tests. They can exclude an HIV infection 12 weeks after the risk situation. These tests are no HIV preventive tools. They do not detect recent HIV infections reliably. In other words, it is not recommended to use these HIV home test for "sero-sorting". That is testing your sexual partners in order to decide not to use condoms regarding their

results. You or your sexual partners could be in the highly infectious primary HIV infection phase, yet your tests would show a negative result.

Sexual health centres have 4th generation HIV rapid tests, which are more sensitive and can exclude an HIV infection six weeks after the risk situation.

A comprehensive check-up tests everywhere infections are common

Infections with sexually transmitted diseases in the throat or anus are common. When testing for gonorrhoea or chlamydia, it is therefore important to take swabs from the anus, throat and urethra (vagina for trans* men). If your doctor only takes a swab from the urethra (or vagina for trans* men), you can and should ask them to take the other two swabs as well.

It's important to inform your sexual partners about infections

If you have a sexually transmitted infection, it makes sense to inform your sexual partners as they might be also infected. If they are informed, they can also get tested and if necessary seek treatment in good time. This is important to the health of sexual partners, and it also prevents sexual partners from repeatedly re-infecting each other (ping-pong effect) or infections being transferred to others.

But informing your partner can be tricky, particularly in the case of HIV. You may not want to let anyone else know that you are infected. In that case you can have the information be given to the partner anonymously by a Checkpoint doctor. But the decision is voluntary, and everyone decides for themselves.

2.6 Key points at a glance



HIV protection

HIV is not transmitted

- if you use a condom;
- if you take PrEP;
- if you have sex (without a condom or PrEP) with an HIV-positive man who is undergoing effective HIV treatment;
- if you have sex with an HIV-negative man.

If you find yourself in a situation where there is a risk of HIV transmission (that is no condom and no PrEP with a man with unknown HIV status), you should find out as soon as possible whether you need PEP.



Dealing with other sexually transmitted infections

You can avoid the consequences of other sexually transmitted infections

1. by getting vaccinated against those infections where a vaccine exists (hepatitis A and B, HPV);
2. by using condoms (and gloves when fisting) to reduce the risk of transmission;
3. by getting tested and seeking treatment:
 - regularly, if you have different sexual partners;
 - if you notice signs of a sexually transmitted infection;
 - at the start of a monogamous relationship, if you want to have sex without protection.





Proper testing

HIV

HIV testing is done with blood. The test detects HIV regardless of how it was transmitted.

Other sexually transmitted infections

Tests are also available for most other infections. Depending on the infection, the test can be performed with blood or a swab.

In the case of gonorrhoea and chlamydia, however, it is important that three swabs are taken and examined: from the anus, throat and urethra.

Informing partners

If a test shows that you have a sexually transmitted infection, you should inform your sexual partners.



The Urgent Action Plan: You are part of the solution.

As a gay man, you have a greater risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections because they are especially widespread in the gay community. But with your help we can change that: Support the action plan of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health and the Swiss AIDS Federation. And take a healthy stand for yourself and all gay men.

3.1 For better sexual health

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are particularly widespread among gay men

Switzerland has an estimated 85 000 men who have sex with men. In 2016, they accounted for around 250 HIV diagnoses. That is as many as for the remaining 4 to 5 million sexually active people in total. Men who have sex with men (MSM) are thus much more severely affected by HIV than the general population.

In addition to HIV, figures among gay men are also high for other sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis and gonorrhoea. And they have been increasing in recent years.

While regular surveys show that most gay men take above-average precautions during sex, for biological and epidemiological reasons, infections nevertheless spread more rapidly among them.

1. Anal intercourse carries the greatest risk of HIV transmission, the reason being the anatomical structure of the intestinal mucosa.
2. Many gay men entertain several simultaneous sexual relationships. These networks often practice unsafe sex.
3. HIV is mostly passed on by persons who are not yet aware of their infection. In the case of gay men, one in two transmissions is believed to occur in the highly contagious initial phase of infection (the primary infection phase), which lasts several months.

The Swiss Federal Office of Public Health and its partners works for and with gay men

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are not just an individual risk for gay men. The high number of cases and strong epidemiological dynamics make them instead a health concern for the entire gay community.

For that reason, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health places a very high priority on prevention among men who have sex with men. Together with the Swiss AIDS Federation and the Checkpoint gay health centres, it has launched an action plan to curb the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections among gay men.

The so-called Urgent Action Plan aims to interrupt the epidemiological dynamics at crucial points: HIV transmission is to be prevented during the highly contagious primary infection phase. If transmission does occur, it is to be detected and treated quickly.

those affected are no longer infectious, and the risk of contracting HIV or any other sexually transmitted infection is reduced for everyone.

It has been shown that a great number of men take part in these campaigns. They are thus taking a stand for their own health but also for the health of the entire gay community. We take this opportunity to thank all those who participate likewise the helpers as well as the gay establishments who put a lot of energy into ensuring that the joint action months reach as many men as possible.

Many men take part in the Urgent Action Plan – thus taking a stand for the health of all

A key element of the Urgent Action Plan are the annual action months Securion and Starman. All gay men are called upon to protect themselves particularly well for one month. This prevents new infections throughout the entire community. In the framework of these campaigns, Checkpoints and other testing and counselling centres offer discounted tests., Diagnosed infections are treated,



We are strengthening and renewing our commitment

So far, the Urgent Action Plan has proved successful. However, as the annual analyses of all new diagnoses show, it has not yet been able to decisively break through the dynamics of the HIV epidemic. But with the growing support of the Urgent Action Plan, the gay community is moving in a promising direction.

For that reason, the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, the Swiss AIDS Federation and the Check-points are further reinforcing the core elements of the Urgent Action Plan and are strengthening their commitment with the community. The Swiss Federal Office of Public Health considers it among its tasks to provide transparent information on current developments in HIV and other sexually transmitted infections in order that all gay men have the basic knowledge to take responsibility for their own health.

This includes the knowledge that it is safe to have sex without a condom with a man who is HIV positive and is undergoing successful HIV treatment. On the other hand, it is risky to have unprotected sex (without a condom or PrEP) with a man who does not know his HIV status. If these facts are known in the entire community, prevention will take a giant step forward.

Important aspects are being added to the Urgent Action Plan

It has by now been clearly established that the individual risks of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are closely linked to other health aspects. Mental health and the use of stimulants play a central role for gay men. They can have a direct influence on protective behaviour during a sexual encounter, just as they can affect the willingness to ensure protection beforehand and get tested if necessary.

That is why the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, the Swiss AIDS Federation and the Check-points are expanding the Urgent Action Plan by including mental health and the use of stimulants as important elements. Even though these aspects are not at the centre of the efforts gay men should be made aware of them. In addition, healthcare providers and prevention organisations are to expand their services.

3.2 Key action areas of the Urgent Action Plan

Action area 1

Preventing HIV transmission in the primary infection phase and thus reducing the global viral load in the gay community

During the regular annual campaign Securion, as many gay men as possible are particularly consistent about protecting themselves until HIV testing the following month (see www.drgay.ch/securion). This allows infections to be detected during the highly infectious primary infection phase and the HIV infection chains among gay men to be broken. Newly diagnosed men quickly starting HIV treatment reduces the number of men highly contagious in the gay community.

Action area 2

Reducing the interval between infection and diagnosis

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are diagnosed within no more than six months after transmission. For this purpose, the Swiss AIDS Federation, the Checkpoints and other testing centres conduct the campaign Starman with discounted testing (see www.drgay.ch/starman).

In addition, HIV-positive gay men get tested once a year for hepatitis C. Ideally, this is done as part of a counselling session at a specialised health centre (Checkpoint or university hospital).

Early diagnosis after infection is important, as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are passed on significantly less frequently once they have been diagnosed.

Action area 3

No transmissions after diagnosis

Anyone diagnosed with HIV or another sexually transmitted infection promptly receives treatment. With HIV, the aim is to lower the viral load to a level where it is undetectable. Once this is achieved, people with HIV are no longer infectious (www.drgay.ch/undetectable). As far as other sexually transmitted infections are concerned, the aim is to cure them fully.

Support task 1: Improving gay men's mental health

Due to minority stress, gay men have increased levels of psychological problems, among them anxiety, low self-confidence, internalised homonegativity and depression – all of which can also have an effect on mental and sexual health, for example by causing anxiety, erectile dysfunction or loss of libido. Both gay men and mental health professionals are therefore made aware of the particular psychological challenges that come with being gay. At a societal level, the underlying causes are addressed; at an individual level, gay men are encouraged to seek help when necessary, for example at a Checkpoint.

Support task 2: Preventing transmission of HIV and hepatitis during chemsex

Special measures are required to protect against the transmission of HIV or hepatitis during chemsex (see page 22). If you are having chemsex, you should get advice on PrEP at a Checkpoint (see page 29). You can prevent transmission of hepatitis C by following the safer use rules (see www.infodrog.ch and www.saferparty.ch), and you can get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B. Gay men are made aware of the risks and protection options with chemsex. A counselling service is being set up at the Checkpoints.

Additional information: symptoms, infections, the principal links

Knowledge is a powerful weapon against sexually transmissible infections. You will find in this chapter the most important information on HIV and other sexually transmissible infections.

I Symptoms of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections

Common symptoms during the primary phase of an HIV infection:

(a few days to several weeks after HIV transmission)

Symptoms can occur individually or in combination. They often subside after three to ten days but sometimes last longer. Often the symptoms aren't even noticed.

Common:

- Fever
- Night sweats
- Severely swollen lymph nodes, not only at the neck
- Skin rash

Less common:

- Muscle and joint pain
- Diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting
- Mucous membrane infections in the mouth, on the penis or at the anus

Coughs and colds do not indicate an HIV infection.

Common symptoms of sexually transmitted infections:

Sexually transmitted infections can remain asymptomatic for long periods. When symptoms do appear, however, they are similar for many sexually transmitted infections. The following are the most common:

- Burning pain when urinating
- Discharge from penis or anus, abnormal and unusual discharge from vagina
- Itching, pain, skin changes on the glans/penis, anus or vaginal entrance (redness, pustules, nodules, blisters, warts, ulcers)
- Changes such as sores in the mouth, throat or anus after oral or anal intercourse
- Pain in the genital area or lower abdomen, possibly during sexual intercourse
- Inflammation of the lymph nodes in the groin

II The principal sexually transmitted infections

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HIV is transmitted through sexual intercourse as well as by sharing syringes and needles when taking drugs. Shortly after infection, the virus proliferates rapidly, whereby mild flu-like symptoms often occur, which generally subside after one or two weeks. The body's immune response leads to the production of HIV antibodies, which can be detected in the blood as early as two weeks and no later than six weeks after the risk situation.

This is followed by a symptom-free latency phase, which can last several months or years, during which the virus continues to proliferate in the body and damage the immune system. At some point, non-specific symptoms start emerging, such as colds, fever, coughing, etc., until finally, in the last stage, AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) develops as a result of the immune deficiency, with life-threatening infections and tumours.

Today, HIV treatment can inhibit the proliferation of the virus. Even though the infection cannot be cured, the immune system recovers and allows for a more or less

normal and healthy life. The sooner you start treatment after an infection, the more you will benefit from it. But even if the HIV infection is only discovered in the AIDS stage, thanks to advanced medical treatments, there is now a real chance of the immune deficiency regressing or its progression being delayed for years

HPV – Human Papilloma Virus

HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) worldwide. Transmission usually occurs during sex but is also possible through intensive bodily contact or smear infection. Injuries from shaving the pubic area or from piercings further increase the chances of infection.

Some types of papilloma virus can trigger various cancers. Cervical cancer is particularly common in women and trans* men. Anal cancer or cancer of the throat can – albeit less frequently – be the result of an HPV infection.

More often, however, certain strains of the papilloma virus (HPV) cause genital warts. These pointed warts typically occur at the transition from skin to mucous membrane in the anal area, on the

foreskin of the penis (in the vaginal area and on the vulva in trans* men), and less often in the mouth. They don't hurt, but they can itch.

Genital warts are treated with ointments, laser, cutting off or freezing. Even after successful treatment, relapses often occur. Follow-up checks are therefore necessary over longer periods of time. Your partner should definitely be treated as well.

Syphilis

Syphilis is a chronic sexually transmitted infection that is caused by the *Treponema pallidum* bacterium. There are three stages of syphilis: The primary stage presents with painless sores at the site of infection (penis, vagina, lip, mouth, throat, anus, rectum), which recede spontaneously after a few weeks. Depending on where they occur, they may go unnoticed. The secondary stage manifests with repeated rashes all over the skin, on the palms of hands and soles of feet, on the genitals and in the mouth. These rashes also tend to disappear on their own. The tertiary stage often occurs after several years, with severe damage to inner organs as well as the brain and nervous system.

The skin changes of the primary stage are particularly infectious, as are those in the anus or mouth that cannot be seen. The same applies to the exudative changes at the genitals and anus during the

secondary stage. That is why many infections are contracted not only through anal sex without condoms but also through oral sex, rimming (arse-licking) and kissing. Syphilis is curable in the first two stages through penicillin injections. Over 80 % of individuals infected with syphilis are men, over 60 % of whom trace their infection to a same-sex contact.

Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea, colloquially known as the clap, is one of the most widespread sexually transmitted infections worldwide. It is caused by the *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* bacterium. Symptoms can manifest as early as the second day after infection. They depend on the site of infection: burning on urination and purulent discharge in case of infection of the urethra. Infections of the vagina, rectum and throat generally are asymptomatic.

Infected sites contain gonorrhoea bacteria that are transmitted through unprotected vaginal or anal sex, unprotected oral sex, rimming (arse-licking) as well as through smear infection. As a result, gonorrhoea can cause inflammation of the prostate and epididymis, and less frequently of the joints and internal organs, and the fallopian tubes in trans* men.

Many strains of the gonorrhoea bacterium are resistant to various antibiotics. For the treatment of gonorrhoea, it is therefore

advisable to consult a specialist and find out how the risk of antibiotic resistance is to be assessed.

Chlamydia

Chlamydia infections are also very frequent and are caused by the *Chlamydia trachomatis* bacterium. Transmission paths are similar to those of gonorrhoea. Symptoms are generally less pronounced and are thus often overlooked. Most men with a chlamydial infection exhibit no or only minor symptoms.

Treatment with antibiotics is possible.

LGV – Lymphogranuloma Venereum

LGV is triggered by a special form of the *Chlamydia trachomatis* bacterium (referred to scientifically as L1, L2 and L3). It causes severe purulent, often scarring inflammation at the site of infection (penis, rectum) and purulent abscesses at the corresponding lymph nodes. Until recently, LGV was very rare, but in recent years it has been appearing increasingly in major European cities, especially in HIV-infected men who have sex with men.

This form of chlamydia can also be fully cured using oral antibiotics, provided that no scarring has yet occurred.

Hepatitis A and B

Hepatitis B is an infectious inflammation of the liver that is triggered by the hepatitis B virus. The virus is transmitted through contact with bodily fluids (especially blood and genital secretions) of infected individuals sharing injection syringes and during intercourse (genital, anal, oral) but also with the slightest skin lesions or through the mucous membrane.

In the classic form of acute hepatitis B infection, non-specific general symptoms manifest between 45 and 180 days after infection and include loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, sometimes joint pain, fever and a rash. In some instances, it develops into jaundice. In about one third of patients, the infection is asymptomatic. Acute hepatitis B generally clears up entirely. In approximately 5% – 10% of individuals infected as adults, hepatitis B becomes chronic, which can lead to cirrhosis of the liver or to liver cancer.

A chronic infection is difficult to treat and cannot be cured with medication. Vaccination against hepatitis B is therefore recommended for all sexually active persons.

Gay men should also get vaccinated against hepatitis A, which is transmitted via the faecal–oral route, i.e. pathogens enter the organism through direct or indirect ingestion of faeces. During anal intercourse, there is a risk of pathogens being transmitted by smear infections, for example through hands.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is an infectious inflammation of the liver that is triggered by the hepatitis C virus. The virus is primarily transmitted through the blood of an infected person. Sexual transmission is relatively rare and only occurs in the case of HIV-positive MSM. Transmission is possible through blood-contaminated penises, condoms, fists, gloves, dildos, etc.

The clinical progress of an acute hepatitis C infection can vary widely. In most cases, the infection progresses asymptotically. In others, it manifests some six to nine weeks (or up to six months) after infection with loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain and sometimes joint pain, fever or a rash. Between 5% and 10% of those infected develop jaundice with yellowing of the skin, mucous membrane and eyes, dark urine and light-coloured stools.

Between 20% and 30% of those infected recover completely from acute hepatitis C, but approximately 70% – 80% develop a chronic infection with the risk of liver cirrhosis or liver cancer. In the past few years, it has become possible to treat hepatitis C successfully. No vaccination exists against the virus.

III Addresses for information, counselling, testing and treatment

Information online:

www.mycheckpoint.ch

The Checkpoint website (health centres for gay men) provides an overview of their services, ranging from HIV/STI testing and treatment to psychotherapy and psychosocial counselling.

www.drgay.ch

The website offers a lot of information about gay health topics. Specialists answer any question about gay sex. The Swiss AIDS Federation is behind the website.

www.myprep.ch

Everything about PrEP. The website is run jointly by several Swiss organisations working in the field of HIV which are committed to gay health.

www.mysize.ch

Set up by the Gütesiegel association, mySize.ch offers a playful way to help you find the right size of condom.

www.aids.ch

The Swiss AIDS Federation website with comprehensive information on HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

www.lovelife.ch

The LOVE LIFE campaign portal of the Federal Office of Public Health, the Swiss AIDS Federation and Sexual Health Switzerland. It contains a lot of information, its own “Gay Life” section and an online tool for checking your risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Publication details

© Federal Office of Public Health
(FOPH)
Publisher: FOPH, Public Health
Directorate November 2018

Information:

Communicable Diseases
Division, FOPH
3003 Bern
Tel +41 (0)31 323 88 11
epi@bag.admin.ch
www.bag.admin.ch/aids

This publication is also available
in German, French and Italian.
A PDF of it can be downloaded at
www.bag.admin.ch/msm

Project management:

- Steven Derendinger,
MSM Project Manager (FOPH)

Project support:

- Dr. Axel J. Schmidt (FOPH,
St.Gallen Cantonal Hospital, Sigma
Research / London School of
Hygiene and Tropical Medicine),
- Andreas Lehner (Swiss AIDS
Federation)

Editors:

Leporis Communication, Zurich,
Stéphane Praz

Design and layout:

TKF Kommunikation & Design
t-k-f.ch

Source:

SFBL, Distribution of Publications,
CH-3003 Bern [http://www.
bundespublikationen.admin.ch](http://www.bundespublikationen.admin.ch)
SFBL stock item number: 311.933.d

Reprints:

permitted (including in parts)
with source reference Printed on
non-chlorine bleached paper



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA
Federal Office of Public Health FOPH



AIDS-HILFE SCHWEIZ
AIDE SUISSE CONTRE LE SIDA
AIUTO AIDS SVIZZERO

