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## If I'm a straight man, can I get HIV?



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Yes! Some people think only gay men or people who inject drugs can get HIV. This is not true. Anyone can be infected because it's not who you are that matters—it's what you do.

Globally, more than 70% of HIV infections result from heterosexual sexual contact. In Canada, more than 7,000 people have been infected with HIV from male/female sex.

### What puts men at risk?

Around the world, men tend to have more sexual partners than women, which puts them and their primary partners more at risk for HIV infection. Men in certain settings are at greater risk. For instance, approximately 90% of prisoners are men. Since HIV infections in prisons are more common than in the general public, due to increased rates of shared equipment for injection drugs and unprotected sex between inmates, men are more likely to be involved in these risk behaviours while incarcerated.

Injection drug use poses a high risk to heterosexual men, but even use of other non-injected drugs like crack cocaine or alcohol can increase sexual risk taking and can increase the risk of HIV infection.

### What makes prevention difficult?

Safer sex guidelines can be at odds with perceived male roles. For example, masculinity and sexuality are sometimes defined by having sex with multiple partners, in contrast to safer sex guidelines that call for reducing the number of partners.

Furthermore, communication between men and women can be difficult, especially talking about condom use, admitting to risk behaviors or talking about HIV status. Traditional social and cultural gender roles often portray women, and

not men, as the “communicator” in relationships, which might lead some men to feel that they are not responsible for communication. Social and cultural gender roles also may lead men to refuse to use condoms, particularly if they believe that condoms can negatively affect their sexual performance or pleasure. Men are also socially expected to be the leaders or “initiators” of sexual activity, giving them more power and control over what happens during that activity, and making it difficult for their partners to talk about and negotiate safer sex practices.

## **How do I reduce the risk of HIV infection?**

- always carry condoms with you, especially if you will be drinking or doing drugs
- talk about safer sex with your partner—before you get into bed (and don’t leave it up to your partner to raise the topic!)
- get tested if you think you have been exposed to HIV—a test is the only way to know for sure.

Like everyone else, straight men need to take responsibility for having safer sex. It’s the only way to protect yourself and your partners.

***For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.***

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**For more copies of this fact sheet or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the**  
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