WHAT HAPPENS IN A SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK?

- For throat or rectal tests a swab will be taken with what looks like a long cotton bud. Some doctors will let you take your own swabs if this is more comfortable for you.
- For infections in your cock, the type of test you have depends if you have symptoms or not. If you do not have any symptoms you will provide a urine sample by pissing into a small jar. The sample is best taken at least two hours after you last pissed so don't piss just before your appointment. If you have a discharge or an ulcer or sore, then a swab will also be taken.
- A blood sample is taken for viral infections such as HIV, hepatitis A, B and C, and bacterial infections such as syphilis.

Sexual health checks are simple and painless. If you go to a sexual health clinic the testing will be free, if you go to a doctor there maybe a charge unless the doctor bulk bills.

Ask your doctor for a full sexual health check – don't expect your doctor to suggest it.

If you are HIV positive tell your doctor you want a sexual health check every time you have your viral load and CD4 count monitored. That way you don't have to ask for it each time.

Get tested for infections in your arse. Even if you never get fucked, you can still get some infections through other arse play such as fingering or fisting.

Check out www.thedramadownunder.info (or www.whytest.org in NSW)

- Information on STIs.
- Find sexual health clinics and other contacts in you area.
- Inform recent sex partners if you have an STI or recently had one (can be anonymous).
- Get regular free SMS or email reminders for sexual health checks.

The more sexual partners you have, the more frequently you should get tested. Being tested every 3–6 months is recommended for men who:

- Have any anal sex without condoms.
- Have more than 10 partners in the past six months;
- Attend sex-on-premises venues (SOPVs).
- Seek partners via the internet.
- Use recreational drugs.

For more information visit www.thedramadownunder.info

Sources:
STIs in Gay Men's Action Group [STIGMA] (2008). Sexually Transmitted Infection Testing Guidelines for Men Who Have Sex with Men.
http://www.ashm.org.au/uploads/STIGMA_STI_Testing_Guidelines_for_MSM.pdf

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GAY MEN'S GUIDE TO SEXUAL HEALTH CHECKS

SEXUAL HEALTH CHECKS

WHAT ARE SEXUALLY TRANSMISSIBLE INFECTIONS (STIs)?

STIs are infections that are transmitted through close body contact, usually sexual. This includes fucking, sucking, as well as touching, fingering or kissing/licking a cock or arse.

STIs generally fall into four categories:

- **Viruses** (e.g. HIV, herpes, genital and anal warts),
- **Bacteria** (e.g. chlamydia, gonorrhoea),
- **Fungi** (e.g. thrush), or
- **Parasites** (e.g. crabs and scabies).

If you get a STI you will often have a symptom such as itchiness, sores or a discharge. But STIs don't always have symptoms. That's why it's important to get a regular sexual health check.

FOR ALL GAY MEN

***At least annual* sexual health checks are recommended for all gay men.**

Sexual health checks include:

- A throat swab for gonorrhoea.
- Anal swabs for gonorrhoea and chlamydia.
- A urine test for chlamydia.
- Blood tests for HIV and syphilis.
- Blood tests for hepatitis A and hepatitis B (and immunisation if required).
- A blood test for hepatitis C if you have ever injected drugs.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE AN STI

- Get tested and treated.
- Refrain from sex until treated.
- Inform recent sex partners.
- Get retested 3 months later (for chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis).

FOR MORE SEXUALLY ACTIVE MEN

A sexual health check is recommended *every 3–6 months* for men with a higher number of sex partners or had any unprotected sex.

You are defined as more sexually active if you:

- Have had more than 10 partners in the last six months.
- Have had ***any*** anal sex without a condom.
- Use sex venues or the internet to find casual partners.

STIs AND HIV

Some STIs make it easier to get HIV, or pass HIV on to others:

- The presence of inflammatory STIs (chlamydia or gonorrhoea), or an ulcerative one (genital herpes, or syphilis) increases the risk of passing on or getting HIV. This is because HIV is more concentrated at the site of infections.
- STIs can also dramatically increase HIV viral load. Having gonorrhoea in your cock can cause a rise in HIV in cum and pre-cum. An increased viral load means there is a greater risk of passing HIV on if you are having unsafe sex.
- Genital and anal herpes increase blood levels of HIV. Herpes also cause an increase in the concentration of HIV at the site of the herpes infection. This occurs whether there are symptoms (blisters) present or not. In fact, most herpes outbreaks are asymptomatic.

STIs may be more severe and more difficult to treat if you are HIV positive:

- Genital and anal herpes outbreaks happen more often if you are HIV positive, and outbreaks tend to last longer if you are not on HIV treatments. Also resistance to drugs used to treat herpes is more common if you have a damaged immune system.
- Syphilis acts more quickly if you have HIV, and is more likely to cause damage to your nervous system if it isn't treated early. If it is not treated, syphilis may eventually damage your internal organs, including your brain, spinal cord and heart.
- Treatment of hepatitis C is less successful if you have a low CD4 count, and it may not be possible to clear the virus.

Regular sexual health checks are particularly important for HIV-positive men.

FOR HIV-POSITIVE MEN

***Additional tests* are recommended for HIV-positive gay men.**

In addition to the sexual health check that is recommended for ***all*** gay men, the following is suggested for HIV-positive men:

- A blood test for hepatitis C.
- Talk to your doctor about getting an anal cancer check.

Anal cancer rates have been increasing in gay men. Some types of the human papilloma virus (HPV), which is the virus that causes genital and anal warts, cause cellular changes in the genitals and anus. These changes sometimes lead to invasive anal cancer. This is more common in HIV-positive gay men and especially in those with a low CD4 count.

FOR GAY MEN AGED 40 YEARS AND OVER

***Additional tests* are recommended for older gay men.**

If you are aged 40 years or over, you should:

- Have a sexual health check at least every year.
- Talk to your doctor about getting an anal cancer checks.