

# BODYWORKS

by  
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A friend and I sat sharing a beer and discussing a topic which seems to permeate every gay man's life - A.I.D.S.. "Damn it!" he exclaimed, "It's just not fair! Here I am, finally out of the closet and feeling comfortable about being sexual, and now I either have to be celibate or jerk off while watching my VCR. Sure wish it was like it use to be, when a guy could fuck all night and live to tell about it. You know, maybe those fundamentalist Bible-bangers are right. Maybe we're getting what we deserve with A.I.D.S.."

Our chat ended and I went on my way. But the words of that friend kept bouncing, emotionally and intellectually, inside of me. What toll is A.I.D.S. taking on my sexual life and that of other gay men? Are gay men reaping what they have sown? Is the only way to deal with this deadly disease to shut yourself off sexually?

Like my friend and many other gay men, the process of "coming out" and acting upon my sexual attraction to other men was a lengthy one. So when I did reach the point of accepting myself and allowing myself to be sexual, it was like a timewarp. I found myself experiencing rebirth of adolescence, feeling a sexual awakening I thought long passed. So I celebrated my gayness in spite of a culture which tried in every conceivable way to tell me I was wrong, bad, sinful. While I may wish that I could confirm those who say that all gay men have hundreds of sexual partners each year, I have had my fair share.

But A.I.D.S. has entered the picture. Now I and all other gay men are labeled "high risk." The headlines scream that having gay sex is like playing Russian roulette. T.V. evangelist announce, with a smug smile, that God is punishing gays for doing things which are "unnatural" and wrong. Many health experts shake their fingers at us and tell us to become monogamous or better yet, celibate.

Unfortunately, too many of us have bought into this hype. Too many of us have fallen prey once again to the lies which have been fueled by the A.I.D.S. epidemic. As Darrell Yates Rist recently wrote in "The Advocate": "We spent agonizing years believing lies about ourselves, hideous lies that fed self-hate, that ate away at us until we feared that any minute we would be destroyed. These lies sneered that we are sinful, we are moral blights, we are sick, we are desperate, that we cannot love, that we're unlovable, that we're sexually obsessed, that we're all

promiscuous, that our relationships don't last. That we cannot control our genitals (as heterosexuals can), that therefore straight folk must control us - that otherwise we won't stop copulating as we wish, without a conscience, without precaution, without responsibility, until we've killed ourselves (for we are suicidal) and killed others (for we are homicidal), too. All of these are brutal lies."

Let us take control again. The sexual freedom which many gay men found prior to A.I.D.S. can still be an option, with certain precautions. Educate yourself about "safe sex." Learn which sexual activities place you and your partner at risk of exposure to the HTLV-III virus and other sexually transmitted diseases. The most important consideration is not who you have sex with, but what types of sexual activities you participate in. (See risk reduction guidelines elsewhere in this newspaper.)

We are all sexual beings and for many of us, the fulfillment of our sexual needs is key to our happiness and well-being. Sex is more than just fucking. It can take many forms and shapes. Take control. Use your imagination. Say "No" to the lies thrown at you. Love and be loved

## AIDS group forms

Springing from the efforts of people working on A.I.D.S. throughout Vermont, a statewide A.I.D.S. organization has been formed. Vermont C.A.R.E.S. (Vermont Committee for A.I.D.S. Resources, Education and Services) will seek to fill the currently existing void in A.I.D.S. resources in Vermont.

After initial organizing meetings in April and May, Vermont C.A.R.E.S. has begun a needs assessment project to identify areas of concern and to plan the most effective ways of meeting those needs. Among the needs the group will evaluate are risk reduction education, services for people with A.I.D.S., training programs for health care and social service workers, general public education, resource referrals, access to alternative therapies, and volunteer recruitment and training.

Vermont C.A.R.E.S. is currently involved in discussions with the Vermont Department of Health on the future of A.I.D.S. education programs in the state. The group is also in the process of incorporating as a non-profit corporation.

Vermont C.A.R.E.S. invites anyone interested in helping to set the direction of A.I.D.S. work or in volunteering in any capacity to talk with them at their table during the Pride celebration, or to attend the next meeting on Sunday, June 29, at 1:30 pm in Burlington. For details contact Terje at 862-5917, Heather or Susan at 479-1795 or David at 658-0147.

## Risk reduction guidelines

A.I.D.S. is spread primarily through sexual contact, and is epidemic right now in the gay men's community. That doesn't mean we can't have sex anymore, but it does mean that we may need to change some of our activities to make sure that both we and our partners stay healthy. With creativity and imagination, sex can still be as much fun as, or even more fun than before.



Some sex is completely safe, with no risk of transmission:

- masturbation (alone or with a partner or partners)
- massage and rubbing (frontage)
- hugging, caressing, stroking, wrestling
- watching others, showing off to others
- talking erotically, kinky, loving, "dirty" or whatever. It's even safe to talk about things that aren't safe - provided that you don't do them.



Some sex is less risky. Although there is no guarantee that these activities are 100% foolproof, there is strong evidence that they significantly reduce your risk of being exposed.

- anal intercourse with a condom (it is important to learn how to use a condom correctly)
- oral sex without cumming in the mouth (or using a condom during oral sex)
- water sports without swallowing (provided there are no open cuts or sores on the skin)



Some sex is more risky. Research indicates that these activities might allow transmission.

- oral sex carried to a climax in the mouth
- rimming (oral/anal contact)
- fisting
- anal intercourse without a condom (this is THE RISKIEST sexual activity)
- sharing sex toys between partners
- any semen or blood being exchanged in an anus, mouth or open skin cuts and sores

Multiple exposures probably increase your chances of becoming sick. If you think you have already been exposed, it becomes even more important to practice safe sex (for both you and your partners).

Take care of yourself. Take care of your friends and community.