



HIV/AIDS

AND

WOMEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH WOMEN



HIV/AIDS is devastating communities in our state. Know the facts, and join in the fight against HIV/AIDS!

For more information on HIV/AIDS or for testing sites in NY, contact New York State's AIDS Hotline at 1-800-541-AIDS

What We Know

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not currently categorize sex between women as a risk factor for HIV. There is little data about HIV and lesbians, and only a handful of studies have included women who partner with women.¹
- If a woman has sex with another woman and has other risk factors, the CDC would classify the HIV transmission under one of those factors or as “undetermined.” Under CDC guidelines, heterosexual sex is not ruled out as a risk factor unless a woman hasn’t had sex with a man since 1978.²
- To date there are no confirmed cases of female-to-female sexual transmission of HIV in the United States database. However, case reports of female-to-female transmission of HIV, and the well documented risk of female-to-male transmission, indicate that vaginal secretions and menstrual blood are potentially infectious and that mucous membrane exposure to these secretions has the potential to lead to HIV infection.³
- Through December 2004, a total of 246,461 women were reported as HIV infected. Of these 7,381 were reported to have sex with women. However, most had other risk factors (such as injection drug use, sex with men who may be infected, or prior to screening measures - receipt of blood products).³
- Of the women who reported to have sex only with women, 91% also had another risk factor - typically drug use.³

Critical Issues / Barriers to Service

- The myth that women can’t transmit HIV to each other has led to several misconceptions, the most prevalent among them being that there are no HIV positive lesbians. However, over five hundred women who primarily identify as lesbians have contracted HIV.¹
- Given the stigma that surrounds women in same-sex relationships, many HIV-positive women choose not to tell their doctors or researchers that they have sexual relationships with women. And in many cases, the physicians and researchers, either because they are uncomfortable with the question or possible answer, simply don’t ask.¹
- Assumptions made by health care providers while taking sexual or social history of lesbian patients can compromise the quality of health care that a lesbian receives as can overt discrimination or homophobia.⁴
- Most HIV prevention messages aren’t reaching lesbians and other women who have sex with women because they have never been the intended targets of these campaigns. The conventional wisdom in HIV health has been that the risk of female-to-female transmission is so low that it never needed to be taken seriously.¹



Care Coordination Committee
Minority Concerns Workgroup

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¹ Curve Magazine - *Lesbians & HIV*- 2006 Vol.13 #4

² Lesbian Life on about.com-2007

³ CDC - *HIV/AIDS Among WSW*-October 2006

⁴ US Office of Women’s Health-*Lesbian Health Facts* Nov. 2000