

Same Sex Attracted Women (WSW)

Sexual health for WSW is important but it can be hard to find accurate information. There is limited information available about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Safer Sex Practices (SSP) in WSW which leads to confusion amongst health professionals and women alike. We do know that WSW have similar rates of STIs and vaginal infections as other women but that different infections are present in each group. A GP or health professional with which WSW can be open with about identity, orientation, relationships and sex life is very helpful for staying safe and healthy.

Safer Sex

STIs can be passed from one person to another when vaginal secretions, blood or semen from one person contacts the mucous membrane (inside the vagina or mouth), broken skin, or blood stream of another person. Some STIs such as herpes and the wart virus (HPV) can be passed on through genital skin to skin contact. Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis and HIV are very rare in women who only ever have female partners however transmission between women is possible.

Higher risk activities include rough sex, use of sex toys or fisting. These activities can place the vaginal secretions of one person into the vagina of another and also increase the risk of trauma or tiny abrasions to the genital skin and mucous membrane and therefore the likelihood of infections being passed on. The risks can be reduced by using water based lube, gloves or condoms on hands, toys and penises; changing hands or condoms between partners and between anal and vaginal sex; or washing hands or toys between partners or anal and vaginal sex.

Risk can also be reduced by minimising potential for trauma to the genital area by having short (and clean) fingernails and using lube. Dams can be used for oral sex to reduce genital skin contact. Dams are single use only and a new dam should be used for new partners or for swapping between vaginal and anal sex.

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is an infection which appears to be more common in WSW. It is not know exactly

what causes BV. We do not know whether it is sexually transmitted between women but this is a possibility. BV can cause an increased grey-white vaginal discharge and an unpleasant fishy odour. It can be treated with antibiotics. Chlamydia is very common in the general population and women who are sexually active with men may be at risk. Chlamydia can be treated with antibiotics. Using condoms and water based lube for vaginal and anal sex with men will reduce the risk of STIs.

Good communication is important for safer sex. It is always OK to say no to any act you are not comfortable with at any time. It is also a good idea to talk with your partner about what you like and what safer sex practices you like to use.

Pap Tests

WSW have similar risks of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) as other women. Some strains of HPV can go on to cause changes to the cells on the cervix which may develop into cancer over time if not detected and treated. Having a pap test every two years is the best way to prevent cervical cancer. WSW need to have pap tests as much as other women even if they have never had sexual contact with men.

Breast Health

Breast cancer is common amongst older women in Australia and WSW have low rates of screening for this condition. For younger women it is a good idea to become familiar with the normal look and feel of your breasts and to have any changes checked by a doctor. For women over 50 a mammogram every two years is recommended and is provided for free through Breast Screen Victoria
Ph 13 20 50.

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Women's Sexual Function. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.



Melbourne
Sexual
Health
Centre

A part of Alfred Health

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre

580 Swanston Street
Carlton Vic 3053
Australia

Tel: (03) 9341 6200

Fax: (03) 9347 2230

Free Call: 1800 032 017

TTY: (03) 9347 8619

Web: www.mshc.org.au

Same Sex Attracted Women (WSW)

Resources

For information on safer sex practices
www.girl2girl.info

ACON

Online health information (NSW based)
www.acon.org.au/womens-health

Opening the Window – a guide to Lesbian Health

<http://www.opendoors.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/opening-the-door-lesbian-health-ACON.pdf>

Health and Health Care for Lesbian, Same Sex Attracted and Bisexual Women:

<http://www.dialog.unimelb.edu.au/index.html>

ALSO Foundation

Online directory, advocacy, community.
www.also.org.au

Gay and Lesbian Switchboard

Provides telephone counselling and information.

Ph 96632939

Regional and Tasmania: 1800184527

Mon-Thur: 6pm-10pm

Wed 2-10pm

Fri-Sun and public hols: 6-9pm

www.switchboard.org.au

Doctor List Recommended for WSW

<http://doclist.com.au/>

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