

and hepatitis B, are also spread through blood. Genital herpes, syphilis, and human papillomavirus (HPV) are most often spread through genital skin-to-skin contact. When discussing your sexual health with a health care provider, make sure to describe your sexual behaviour and ask about the risks of specific sex acts. You should also get tested for HIV annually, or more often if you change partners, have casual or new partners or have been diagnosed with an STI.

Most STIs have no signs or symptoms. The only way to know your STI status is to get tested.

Consider the following recommendations to reduce your risk of STIs and BBVs to you and your partner(s):

- Negotiate safety with your partner(s) and discuss the acceptable levels of risk for everyone involved.
- Use barriers such as gloves, dental dams, and condoms with body parts and sex toys; many sexual health clinics and other health care facilities offer these free-of-charge.
- Clean sex toys before sharing with others.
- Avoid oral sex if either of you has any cuts or sores in the mouth or on the lips.
- Use a condom (which is routinely recommended for oral sex, as chlamydia and gonorrhea can be transmitted to the throat) and/or a dental dam (for rimming).
- Be aware that the use of alcohol and drugs before or during sex, sharing needles, and some BDSM/kink activities may involve a greater level of risk and should include negotiation.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B, and HPV (though the latter is only covered by Public Health for MSM who are 26 years old or younger).
- Ask your health care provider whether PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) or PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) would be helpful for you for HIV prevention.
- Some trans people taking hormones may still be able to get pregnant or impregnate their partner. To reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancy, use a condom, other barrier method, or talk to your health care provider about options.

RELATIONSHIP SAFETY AND HEALTH

Healthy relationships are based on mutual respect, open communication, and make you feel happy, supported, and loved.

Intimate partner violence is physical or sexual violence, stalking, or emotional or psychological abuse by a current or former partner. Intimate partner violence does occur in relationships between men.

If your partner treats you in a way that makes you feel unsafe or bad about yourself, depressed or anxious; if your partner harasses and follows you; controls your money, where you go, who you see, and your social media; if your partner threatens you; if your partner hits, punches or kicks you or forces you to engage in sexual activity against your will - don't suffer in silence.

If you feel unsafe or have experienced abuse or violence, you can seek support from a health care provider, a counsellor, or a crisis line. If there is any possibility that your partner(s) would access the same support services as you, especially in a small community, let the service provider know.

Find support and help

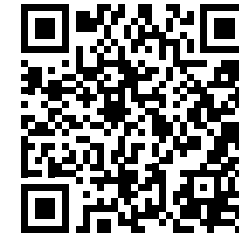
Ontario Victim Support Line
1-888-579-2888



ADDITIONAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES

Visit rainbowhealthontario.ca/2slgbtq-health-resources

or scan this code with your mobile device:



This brochure was created by Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO). A program of Sherbourne Health, RHO creates opportunities for the healthcare system to better serve 2SLGBTQ communities.

 RainbowHealthOntario.ca

 twitter.com/RainbowHealthOn

 facebook.com/RainbowHealthOntario

Health care providers can visit Learn.RainbowHealthOntario.ca to find out more about our courses designed to increase competency in serving 2SLGBTQ service users.



rainbow health ontario
SHERBOURNE HEALTH

about gay health

Gay men and men who have sex with men (MSM) are a diverse community. Gay men have many of the same health care needs as men in the general population but are at a higher risk for certain diseases.

Your health is influenced by many factors beyond sexual orientation. Discrimination, racism, and negative attitudes towards gay men are not uncommon and may be experienced when seeking health care.

Health care providers may be homophobic, or they may not know much about your health concerns.

This brochure outlines some of the health issues of concern to gay men.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

Being healthy means taking care of your physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and spiritual needs. It can be difficult to come out about your sexual orientation, gender or medical history to your health care provider. But being your authentic self can promote good health and wellbeing.

Don't delay or avoid seeking services because you have had negative experiences, or are concerned about discrimination, stigma, confidentiality, your immigration status, or other factors. Getting regular check-ups and care from a compassionate, knowledgeable, and informed care provider is important to staying healthy.

TIPS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF HEALTH CARE YOU RECEIVE

- Educate yourself about possible health concerns, risks, and options. Your sexual orientation, race or ethnicity may also increase your risk of certain diseases and conditions.
- Seek out health care providers and spaces that are 2SLGBTQ-positive.
- Visit potential providers and ask questions. You have every right to know what training and experience your provider has in 2SLGBTQ care.
- Listen for how the provider speaks with you and whether you are encouraged to talk about your concerns. If your provider seems open but uninformed, you can suggest Rainbow Health Ontario's courses designed to increase the 2SLGBTQ competency of health care providers.
- Bring a support person with you to your appointment.
- If you feel safe, identify yourself as gay or MSM so that you can be open about discussing the issues that are of concern to you, and your provider can better understand how to help you stay healthy.
- If you do not feel comfortable with a provider, look for another.

FINDING A HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL

Ask other 2SLGBTQ people for recommendations about health care providers and services. Several large cities now have health care

centres that provide comprehensive, culturally competent care for 2SLGBTQ people.

If there are not many providers in your region, look into accessing providers via the Ontario Telemedicine Network.

RHO Service Provider Directory
rainbowhealthontario.ca/lgbt2sq-health/service-provider-directory/

HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH USING ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, DRUGS

Some studies suggest that use of tobacco, alcohol and other recreational drugs may be higher among 2SLGBTQ individuals when compared to the general population.

If you use tobacco, alcohol, and/or drugs, learning about the effects and side effects can help make your use safer. There are many types of harm reduction and cessation programs, and your health care provider can help you choose one that's right for you.

CANCER SCREENING

Screening can stop cancer before it starts or can detect cancer in its early stages, at which point it is more treatable and/or curable.

Who should get screened?

- Individuals should be screened for cancer based on the organs that they have (e.g. prostate, testicles, cervix, breasts, colon), rather than based their gender identity or sexual orientation/practices.
- Anyone with breast tissue is at risk for breast cancer and should be screened according to guidelines. Make sure you are enrolled in the Ontario Breast Screening Program, which may not happen automatically depending on your gender on file.
- Anyone with a cervix should get regular pap tests to screen for HPV and cervical cancer.
- People who have anal sex are at higher risk for contracting HPV, which can lead to anal cancer.
- Some providers recommend that people who have anal sex get regular anal pap screening, though this is not currently widely available.
- Regular screenings for prostate, testicular and colon cancer may be recommended based on age and risk.

Speak to your general practitioner about cancer screening. You have the right to receive screening that is appropriate for you. If you don't have a general practitioner, there are some screenings that are available without a referral.

YOUR EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Your mental health is influenced by your sense of self-worth and the level of stress you experience, as well as the acceptance and inclusiveness of spaces where you live, work, and play. Most gay men and MSM have and maintain good mental health. However, homophobic environments can have negative effects on your health.

The burdens of stress and discrimination may be more acute for gay men and MSM who have experienced other forms of trauma, are Indigenous, racialized, or are disabled. As a result, gay men and MSM may experience higher rates of mental distress, depression, anxiety, suicide, and illegal substance use when compared to other men.

MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Having a supportive group of friends and family members (whether family of origin or chosen family) who understand and affirm your sexuality is often key to successfully dealing with the stress of day-to-day life and maintaining good mental health.

You can also find support by:

- Getting involved in community, social, athletic, religious, peer support and other groups.
- Exploring various coping strategies to deal with stresses and manage self-care such as meditation, physical activity and enjoyable activities.
- Seeking mental health counseling and support groups that are sensitive to the needs of gay men and MSM.

BODY IMAGE AND HEALTH

Body image, or the way that you view your own body, is something that impacts people of all shapes, sizes, colors, sexualities, and genders. Individuals in 2SLGBTQ communities experience and confront body image issues in unique ways.

The 2SLGBTQ community is disproportionately affected by eating disorders. Studies have found that gay adolescents as young as 12 years old may be at higher risk of binge-eating and purging behaviors than their heterosexual peers. Some gay men may excessively diet or exercise to achieve community standards of physical beauty, while other gay men's communities celebrate large bodies. Nutrition and weight concerns can become unhealthy if they make you feel depressed, cause physical harm, result in eating disorders, or put you at further risk for chronic health diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

SEXUAL HEALTH

If you're having sex, there are ways to do it safely so you're protecting yourself and others. You should feel safe, empowered, and have the kind of sex you want. You should never be pushed into anything that you are uncomfortable with.

Men who have sex with men have a higher incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), which may be influenced by multiple factors, including individual behaviors, number of lifetime or recent sexual partners, rate of partner exchange, and frequency of condomless sex. A person's risk of exposure to STIs and blood-borne viruses (BBV) depends on the body parts and fluids involved in sexual activity with another person, rather than a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

STIs are spread through sexual contact with someone who has an STI. Sexual contact includes oral, anal, and vaginal sex, as well as genital skin-to-skin contact.

Some STIs—like HIV, chlamydia, and gonorrhea—are spread through sexual fluids, like semen. Other STIs, including HIV