

Sexual safety first

Having a good time doesn't have to come at the cost of your or your lover's health

As the New Year rolls in and each of us prepare for the coming warmth of spring, perhaps it's wise to stop and take a moment to reflect on our sexual health and wellness. After all, with the warmth of spring and summer comes all sorts of sensuous temptations; don't get caught off-guard when Mr. Right (or Ms. Right Now) comes a knocking.

Prevention

As you see yourself through the rest of these cold, wintry days don't forget to protect yourself and your lovers. It's easy to hop online, "order in" and have a treat come to your warm and toasty home, and it's just as easy to keep condoms, lube and other personal items handy.

Most sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS can be prevented with the simple and proper use of condoms, though you'll still want to be careful when it comes to herpes and syphilis which can be spread through skin-to-skin contact in places where condoms and other latex barriers can't protect. For more on safe, effective and proper condom use, visit avert.org/condom.htm.

Testing

Make yourself a new ritual and tradition this New Year and keep your sexual, as well as physical health, in check. In January, head to your physician or other healthcare provider and schedule an annual physical. Oftentimes, physicians include STI and HIV/AIDS testing as a part of routine treatment, though if your doctor doesn't consider asking her to perform these easy tests. If you aren't able to see a private physician, there are plenty of public and private resources to help you gain access to STI and HIV/AIDS testing. Knowing your HIV status, as well as your status regarding other STIs, is often the most important step in preventing transmission. Check

qnotes' online QGuide at goqnotes.com/qguide for links and contact information for AIDS service organizations in your area, most of which offer free and confidential STI and HIV/AIDS testing.

Hepatitis vaccination

Ah! The wonders of medicine. Among some of the most commonly-transmitted STIs are Hepatitis A and B. In fact, some people might already be infected with either of the virus strains and not even know it. Be sure to ask your doctor about vaccinations for Hep A and B, which are recommended for most young people under 18 and those adults who are most at risk.

Both vaccinations for Hep A and B require some time and effort, though the payoff is well worth it. Hep A vaccinations require a round of two or three doses and adults need a booster dose six months-to-one year after the initial dose. The vaccine is effective for 15-20 years or more and start providing protection as early as two-to-four weeks after the vaccination process is complete.

Hep B vaccinations require three separate injections over a period ranging from six months to one year. Like that for Hep A, this vaccination will protect against Hep B infection for 15 years or longer.

Hep A and B prevention is also easy, and includes commonsense solutions like practicing safer sex, washing hands with soap and warm water following restroom use or before food preparation, never sharing drug use-related items (like needles, straws, etc.) or body-care items like toothbrushes, razors and nail clippers.

Note: There is no vaccine to prevent Hepatitis C.

HPV vaccination

A few years ago, the gay male community got into a bit of a tizzy when news broke of a new HPV vaccine. Though approved for girls and women, no tests had been done to gauge



Photo Credit: See-ming Lee, via Flickr. Licensed under Creative Commons.

its effectiveness for use in boys and men. Now, men, too, can be protected from HPV transmission.

HPV, which causes genital warts, can also cause cervical cancer in women and anal cancer in men.

Girls and women can choose from two vaccines, Cervarix and Gardasil. Men can be vaccinated with Gardasil, which is recommended for both men and women through 26 years of age.

For more information, visit cdc.gov/hpv/.

— *qnotes* staff

..... "Shall we tour the French countryside tonight?"

"Oui."

STIR THINGS UP.

BIG NIGHT OUT * France *

Join us for our latest Big Night Out influenced by the French countryside. Classic ingredients and recipes lend a rustic character to a menu filled with distinctive French influences.

FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY

The
Melting Pot.
a fondue restaurant

901 S. Kings Dr Suite 140-B, Charlotte
704-334-4400

230 E. WT Harris Blvd Suite C-1, Charlotte
704-548-2432

Reservations recommended

Fondue coast to coast
Locally owned and operated
meltingpot.com