



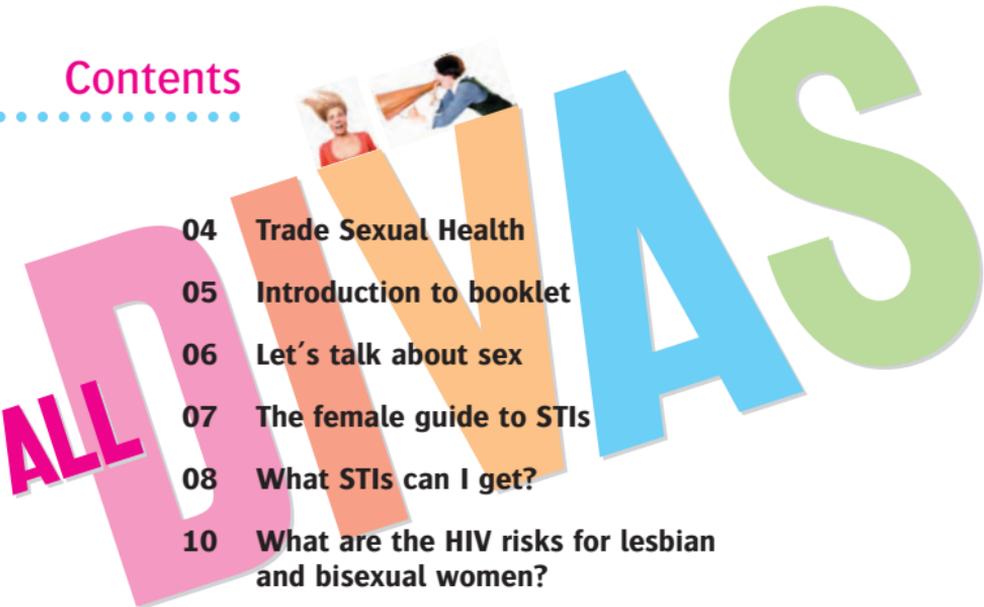
**CALLING ALL DIVAS**

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The basic guide to sexual and personal health  
for the **lesbian and bisexual woman**



**CALLING**

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## Trade Sexual Health

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Trade Sexual Health is a HIV prevention & sexual health promotion charity for anyone who identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, man who has sex with men (MSM) or woman who has sex with women (WSW) living or working in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

From our Leicester office we offer sexual health and testing information, rapid HIV testing, safer sex advice, free safer sex packs for men and women, counselling and one-to-one support with 'coming out', sexuality and relationships, assistance in the reporting of homophobic hate crime and incidents, community events including outreach on the scene and volunteering opportunities.

## Thank you

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This booklet had been produced by Trade Sexual Health. We would like take this opportunity to thank Craig Everitt – Clinical Manager, Sexual Health Services, University Hospitals of Leicester for providing the content of the booklet, Katie Hunt and Toni Jones for helping to produce the booklet and all volunteers and groups involved.



## Introduction

This is the updated edition of our Calling all Divas booklet.

Trade, Leicester's LGB sexual health charity, has produced this basic guide for lesbian, bisexual women and women who have sex with women (WSW). It provides information around sexual health, smear testing, being breast aware, menopause, HRT and some top tips to help you look after your health.



## Let's talk about sex



Sex can be, and for many is, a big part of an intimate relationship and can be a fun way of getting to know your partner. Below is a list of common practices for women who have sex with women, however each is down to personal preference.

### **Fingering**

This is stimulating the vagina with your fingers. Be aware of long finger nails.

### **Oral sex**

This is the stimulation of vagina and clitoris with your tongue and lips. This can be through licking or sucking.

### **Rimming**

This is the stimulation of the anus with your tongue or lips. This can be through licking, kissing, and inserting the tongue into the anus.

### **Fisting**

This is where you stimulate the vagina or anus through slowly inserting all fingers, often one at a time, into your partner to stimulate the vaginal or anal wall.

### **Tribadism**

This the stimulation of a woman's genitals through rubbing yours on hers. This is often a more intimate sexual act which can be done in a range of sexual positions.

The above sexual acts can put women at risk of contracting or passing on sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

## The female guide to STIs

Contrary to popular belief, lesbian and bisexual women are at risk from sexually transmitted infections. It is really important for women who have sex with women to have a good understanding about how to stay safe during sex.

Many lesbians believe if they only have sex with women then they can't catch an STI. From a recent survey\*, 85% of women who identify as lesbian have had sex with a man in their past, so even if you and your partner have only had sex with women your ex's, or their ex's, may have experienced heterosexual sexual contact.

All lesbian and bisexual women can be at risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection.

\* Prescription For Change: Lesbian & Bisexual Women's Health Check 2008  
[www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)



## What STIs can I get?



Women who have sex with women are at risk of contracting all STIs, however we at TRADE thought it was important to let you know the ones you are most at risk of.

### **B.V (Bacterial Vaginosis)**

This is an overgrowth of bacteria in the vagina causing a smelly vaginal discharge and is more common amongst women who have sex with women.

### **Chlamydia & Gonorrhoea**

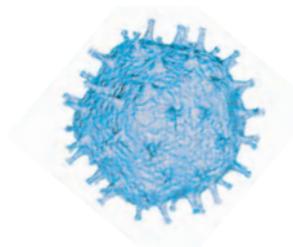
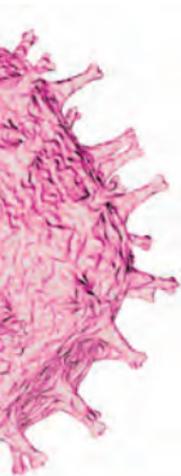
These are bacteria which are found in the semen and vaginal fluids of infected people. Infection can be spotted by increased vaginal discharge, spot bleeding/irregular bleeding pattern and painful urinating, although some women may not show any symptoms.

### **Crabs/Pubic Lice**

These cling to pubic and body hair, causing itching and blood spots on the skin and are easily passed on from close body contact.

### **Genital Warts**

Warts are a common virus of the skin. Small fleshy lumps appear around the genitals and can also be found inside the vagina and on the cervix.





## Hepatitis

This is a viral infection which affects the liver and can be easily passed on through blood and faeces.

## Herpes

Herpes shows itself as small painful sores anywhere on the genitals, around the mouth and nose (cold sores) and fingers and hands (whitlows). This is a virus that remains in your body and outbreaks of symptoms can appear more than once.

## Syphilis

This is a very infectious bacteria and will result in painless ulcers normally at the site of entry. Ulcers in the mouth and vagina are sometimes unnoticeable.

## Thrush

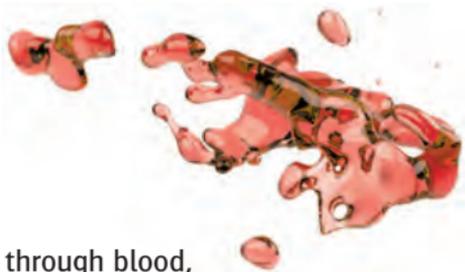
This is an overgrowth of yeast causing vaginal itching often with a thick white discharge.

## T.V. (Trichomonas Vaginalis)

A frothy, itchy vaginal discharge caused by a parasite that is commonly transmitted by sharing sex toys.



## What are the HIV risks for lesbian and bisexual women?



HIV can be transmitted through blood, breast milk, vaginal fluids and semen. Although the risk of transmitting HIV between women is low some same sex sexual practices do carry a risk of infection.

### **Oral sex**

Cuts or sores in the mouth or genitals leave you at risk.

### **Sex on your period**

All types of sex put your partner more at risk when you're on your period. They may have a cut or sore on their hands or mouth.

### **Sharing sex toys**

Remember to use barrier protection such as condoms.

### **Rough sex**

Fisting and S&M activities can lead to bleeding or tearing of the vagina/anus.

### **Donor insemination**

Remember to use a health service approved sperm bank to eliminate risk. If you are using a donor without using the health services make sure they have a HIV test.

For a HIV test contact your local GUM clinic. See contact details on page 21.



## Safer sex tips between women

There are a few easy steps women who have sex with women can take to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

- If you use sex toys, use a new condom for each partner and between penetration of different orifices.
- Wash sex toys after use with soap and water.
- Avoid oral sex if either of you has cuts or sores in the mouth or on the lips.
- Some infections are transmitted by hands, fingers and mutual vulval rubbing. Make sure you wash your hands before and after sex.
- Keep nails short to avoid nipping your partner.
- Wear latex gloves and use plenty of water based lubricant for vaginal and anal fisting.
- Using a barrier makes it less likely that infections will get passed on. You can get free condoms, lubricant, latex gloves and dental dams from Trade Sexual Health.



## Dental dams

Dental dams, also known as oral barriers are designed for use during oral sex and rimming in order to reduce the risk of contracting a STI. A dental dam is a thin sheet of latex, often flavoured, which prevents skin to skin contact whilst still allowing sensitivity and the stimulation of your partner.

### How do I use a dental dam?

- Lay the dam flat and cover both the vaginal opening and the clitoris. Hold the dam in place and you're ready.
- Lay the dam flat and cover the anus. Hold the dam in place and off you go!
- If using lubricant, ensure it is on the vagina or anus before placing the dam, and ensure you only use water based lubricants.
- Always use a new dam if you are switching from oral sex to rimming or vice versa.

Dental dams/oral barriers should be available over the counter at chemists. You can also get free dental dams from Trade Sexual Health.



## Womens health

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Cervical screening (smear test) is offered to all women over the age of 25 on a three yearly basis regardless of their sexual orientation or behaviour. From the age of 49 the tests will be offered every five years until the age of 64.

This test is taken to look for abnormal cell changes from the cervix. Regular screening prevents 75% of cervical cancers from developing.



### Where do I go?

If you feel comfortable with your GP surgery, normally your practice nurse will carry out this test for you. You also have the option of being screened at the local contraceptive service clinic where they are trained in women's health care.

### I have never had sex with a man, so I don't need a smear test?

Nearly all cases of cervical cancer are associated with the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). HPV is passed on through bodily fluids. This means that transferring vaginal fluids on hands and fingers, oral sex, or sharing sex toys, can all be ways of being exposed to HPV. For women this is a problem, as the virus causes cell changes which left untreated can develop into cancer.

HPV can be carried by someone for a number of years, without them even knowing it, so it's best to get checked.



## Be breast aware

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Breast cancer affects many women of all sexual orientations. One in ten women are at risk of developing breast cancer in their lifetime and on average 38,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year in the UK\*.

Detecting cancer early means that the treatment is more likely to be effective. Knowing what your breasts normally feel like will help you be able to detect abnormal changes. The appearance and feel of breasts can change at different times of the menstrual cycle.



\* Breast Cancer Precautions  
[www.breastcancerprecautions.com](http://www.breastcancerprecautions.com)

## What to look for in my breasts



When checking your breasts it is important to be aware of what changes are normal in your body's menstrual cycle. We have developed a short list of the main things to check.

- Changes in the outline or shape of the breast.
- Changes in the look or feel of the skin, such as puckering or dimpling.
- Discomfort or pain in one breast that is unusual, particularly if it is new or persistent.
- Any new lumps, thickening or bumpy areas in one breast or armpit, which differs from the same part of the other breast and armpit.
- Nipple discharge that is new to you and not milky.
- Bleeding from the nipple.
- Moist red areas on the nipple that don't heal easily.
- Any changes in nipple position, such as pulled up or pointing differently.
- A rash on/or around the nipple.

If you notice any of these changes, see your GP immediately.

## Menopause

Every woman will go through the menopause though each will experience it differently. The average age women go through menopause is 52 years old, but a woman could start to experience menopausal symptoms between the ages of 45-55 years old.

### Menopause symptoms

- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Sleep disturbances
- Vaginal symptoms such as dryness, itching or discomfort
- Urinary symptoms: many women become more prone to urinary infections such as cystitis
- 70% of women experience the most common symptoms of hot flushes & night sweats

## Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)



HRT can help prevent women from developing osteoporosis by replacing the oestrogen lost during the menopause. It is good at controlling menopausal symptoms, but it can slightly increase the risk of developing conditions such as breast cancer and deep vein thrombosis.

## Sex and the menopause

During menopause lower levels of oestrogen can decrease the blood supply to the vagina. This can affect vaginal lubrication, causing the vagina to become dry and uncomfortable.

We at Trade have come up with some quick tips to help menopausal women continue to have great sex.

### Top tips

- Increase sensitive touching to enhance natural lubricants before vaginal penetration
- Use water based lubricants; these are available in different flavours and can also come with enhancing qualities such as tingle and heat
- Use of erotic materials such DVDs or books
- Try a new sex toy for a different sensation of penetration and vibration



## How to contact Trade

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If you feel you need some advice or support, then visit our Leicester city office or contact us by telephone or email. All our services are confidential.

**Address: Trade Sexual Health, 15 Wellington Street, Leicester LE1 6HH**

**Telephone: 0116 254 1747**

**Website: [www.tradesexualhealth.com](http://www.tradesexualhealth.com)**

**Email: [info@tradesexualhealth.com](mailto:info@tradesexualhealth.com)**

**Join our Facebook group: [trade sexual health](#)**

**Opening times: Monday to Thursday: 9.30am - 5.30pm  
and Friday: 9.30am - 4.30pm**



# Local and national sexual health services for lesbian and bisexual women

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**GUM Clinic** - Sexual Health Clinic (Leicester)

Tel: 0116 258 5208

**GUM Clinic** - Sexual Health Clinic (Loughborough)

Tel: 01509 568 888

**St. Peters Contraceptive Service** (Women's Health)

Tel: 0116 295 1212

**Breast Cancer Care East Midlands**

Tel: 0845 0771 893

**Sexual Health Helpline**

Tel: 0800 567 123

**NHS Direct**

Tel: 0845 4647



## Want more information?

Check out information relating to Lesbian and Bisexual sexual and personal health care and information

### Lesbian and bisexual sexual health

[www.healthwithpride.nhs.uk/](http://www.healthwithpride.nhs.uk/)

[www.stonewall.org.uk/at\\_home/health/2660.asp](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_home/health/2660.asp)

[www.nhs.uk/Livewell/LGBhealth/Pages/lesbianhealth.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/LGBhealth/Pages/lesbianhealth.aspx)

### Cervical screening

[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical/publications/lesbian-bisexual-leaflet-sep09.pdf](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical/publications/lesbian-bisexual-leaflet-sep09.pdf)

[www.lgf.org.uk/screening](http://www.lgf.org.uk/screening)

### Breast awareness

[www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)

[www.uhl-tr.nhs.uk/fundraising/breast-care-centre](http://www.uhl-tr.nhs.uk/fundraising/breast-care-centre)

### General health

[www.fpwa.org.au/resources/guidetohealthlbw.pdf](http://www.fpwa.org.au/resources/guidetohealthlbw.pdf)





CALLING ALL

DIVAS



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**Trade Sexual Health, 15 Wellington Street, Leicester LE1 6HH**

**Telephone: 0116 254 1747**

**Website: [www.tradesexualhealth.com](http://www.tradesexualhealth.com)**

**Email: [info@tradesexualhealth.com](mailto:info@tradesexualhealth.com)**

**Join our Facebook group: [trade sexual health](#)**

