

## MEDIA RELEASE: Are you really sure he's HIV negative too?

For immediate release, 16 September 2009

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## Are you really sure he's HIV negative too?

One of the key strategies HIV negative gay men use when seeking to fuck without using a condom is to find a sexual partner who is also HIV negative. This technically is known as sero-sorting and seems like a reasonable enough strategy. To be successful this strategy requires that both partners know their HIV status and that they actually talk about it before engaging in unprotected sex. In practice this rarely happens.

A recent Melbourne study indicated that nearly a third of people anonymously testing positive for HIV thought that they were HIV negative and we also know that approximately 1 out of every three new HIV infections is passed on by people who do not know their HIV status. If you are relying on the other person to accurately know their HIV status the evidence suggests you are risking your own health and greatly increasing the chances that you will contract HIV.

Its important to consider that if your new sexual partner is willing to have unprotected sex with you then there is every chance they are having unprotected sex with other people as well. Unless they have taken a HIV test since their last risky episode and that episode was more than three months ago (window period) they cannot be sure of their real HIV status. Despite relatively high rates of HIV testing amongst gay men in Adelaide we also know that the majority of sexually active gay men do not test anywhere near regularly enough. So when someone tells you they are HIV negative it doesn't mean they necessarily are.

More alarmingly most gay men are only guessing their sexual partner's HIV status. This is a dangerous and foolhardy strategy because you can't tell someone's HIV status by looking at them or by assuming that since he hasn't asked to use condoms he must also be HIV negative.

Australian researcher, Jeanne Ellard found that men use a lot of rationalisations to talk themselves into unsafe sex. When she interviewed some gay men who had been recently diagnosed with HIV she discovered that the men had many reasons for believing that they wouldn't get HIV. One guy rationalised that "fit" guys on the scene



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must be negative. "If they were HIV-positive their quality of life would be lower and they wouldn't be out partying." Another explained his decision to not use condoms by saying "I'd think about all the times I'd had unprotected sex and was fine, and concluded that that showed there weren't many HIV positive guys, I certainly didn't know any."

Recent study shows that when HIV negative men are guessing their partners status, they are more likely to engage in unprotected fucking. Amongst negative gay men who don't know a lot of positive men in their day to day lives, their first assumption is that everyone else is negative too. In South Australia, with around 650 gay men living with HIV, and most keeping their status private, many negative guys may feel they don't know anybody that is positive, and this affects their decisions when deciding whether to fuck without a condom.

We know that disclosing your HIV status and asking others to do the same is a difficult thing for many gay men, stigma and discrimination are still real for many HIV positive men. Unless you are doing this you are making assumptions about others that whilst comforting at the time, have no basis in reality and you should choose to use a condom instead.

How can you be sure he's HIV negative too when there is every chance that he can't be sure himself?



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