

DIVERSIFICATION OF SAFE SEX PRACTICES AMONG AUSTRALIAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN

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Drawing on social and behavioural research, particularly the Gay Community Periodic Surveys and PrEPARE Project, this presentation will review the evolution of HIV risk reduction practices used by gay and bisexual men over the last 15 years, and the opportunities and challenges this poses for HIV education and prevention. In particular, the presentation will highlight the transition from a phase in which condom use was the dominant safe sex strategy employed for casual sex, to the emergence of strategies based on knowledge of HIV status (e.g. serosorting). In the contemporary period, we increasingly see HIV-positive men and their partners relying on treatment as prevention and a burgeoning cohort of HIV-negative men using pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). The contemporary period, with its emphasis on antiretroviral-based prevention, has disrupted notions of what safe sex and how it can be practised. This creates new opportunities for curtailing HIV transmission, but also a challenge to sustain a shared sense of a community working together to maintain a safe sex culture. Managing the potential for misunderstandings, criticism and disagreement between gay and bisexual men using different prevention methods is one of the key challenges of the contemporary period.

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