

## Fact sheet: HIV & sex work

Do you sell sex, or do you know someone who does?



Find out how to protect your sexual health and prevent HIV infection.

### What is sex work?

Sex work involves the provision of sexual services in exchange for money/goods, either regularly or occasionally.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual services could include:

- oral sex
- penetrative sexual intercourse
- using sex toys to stimulate pleasure
- performing fantasies and/or fetish sex.

Sex work can take place in a brothel, on the street or in any other place.

Sex work is criminalised in many countries.<sup>2</sup>

As a sex worker, you still have rights.

### Sex work and HIV transmission

Sex workers may be more vulnerable to HIV due to:

- large numbers of sex partners
- unsafe working conditions
- unable to negotiate condom use
- social stigma & discrimination
- criminalised work environments.

Remember, clients may have large sexual networks that could have exposed them to HIV... always use a condom to protect yourself.<sup>3</sup>

Don't let the promise of more money influence you to have unprotected sex and risk your health.

You have the right to access HIV prevention, testing and treatment to protect yourself.

Know your HIV status and get treatment early if you test HIV-positive.

### Protecting yourself from HIV

- Use condoms consistently and correctly. Use a female condom if the client refuses to use a male

condom.

- If the client refuses to use a condom, offer non-penetrative activities such as masturbation, external ejaculation or using clean sex toys.<sup>4</sup>
- Use lubricant to reduce friction and prevent the condom breaking, especially for anal sex.
- Access emergency contraception and emergency HIV treatment (PEP) if the condom breaks.

Read AVERT's '[Emergency HIV Treatment](#)' fact sheet for more information.

- Refuse offers of more money for unprotected sex.
- Many sexually transmitted infections (STIs) do not have symptoms so access regular sexual health check ups & HIV testing.
- Do not trust or assume your client is HIV-negative or has no STIs.
- Avoid using drinks or drugs before you engage with a client.
- Avoid working alone - have friends you can call on.

## Sexual health check-ups and HIV testing

It is important to have regular sexual health check ups even if you never have unprotected sex.

Some STIs can be passed on even if you use a condom.

Having an STI makes you more vulnerable to HIV infection.

Know your HIV status to protect your own health and that of others.

Read AVERT's '[HIV and STIs](#)' and '[HIV Testing](#)' fact sheets for more information.

## If you are a HIV-positive sex worker

If you test positive for HIV:

- access HIV treatment to improve your health.
- take HIV treatment and use condoms consistently if you continue sex work.
- access HIV counselling for advice about living with HIV and managing your work.

## Male and transgender sex workers

If you are a male or transgender sex worker, advice around HIV is similar to that for female sex workers.

In addition to this:

- access counselling and advice about having post-surgery sex.
- if you use drugs to improve sexual performance such as Viagra, make sure you know the facts about them<sup>5</sup>
- use plenty of lube for anal sex.<sup>6</sup>

## Know your rights

You have the right to:

- refuse a client for any reason
- insist on using a condom
- be free from forced sex work, either by an employer, a manager or a client
- be aware of the law on sex work in your country.



- 1. American Jewish World Service, accessed on NSWP (2013) 'Sex Worker Rights - (Almost) everything you wanted to know but were afraid to ask'
- 2. International Planned Parenthood Federation - Criminalise Hate Not HIV portal 'Countries where sex work ('prostitution') is deemed illegal' [accessed March 2016]
- 3. World Health Organisation (December 2012) 'Prevention and treatment of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections for sex workers in low- and middle-income countries - Recommendations for a public health approach'
- 4. Global Network of Sex Worker Projects 'Making Sex Work Safe' PDF Document [accessed March 2016]
- 5. Global Network of Sex Worker Projects 'Making Sex Work Safe' PDF Document [accessed March 2016]
- 6. World Health Organisation (December 2012) 'Prevention and treatment of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections for sex workers in low- and middle-income countries - Recommendations for a public health approach'

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