

Priorities, please

One of the many topics we are often asked about at the VAC is PEP. PEP stands for Post-Exposure Prophylaxis which, as expressions go, isn't one that rolls off the tongue!

I find it easier to explain it this way: post means after; exposure means if you think you've come into contact with HIV; and, prophylaxis is just another word for treatment. So, after you think you've been exposed to HIV there is a treatment that may prevent you from becoming infected with HIV.

There are some important considerations to think about, most importantly the need to commence PEP treatment within 72 hours from when you think you've come into contact with HIV. Also, PEP is not a morning-after pill — it is a course of medications you take for 28 days — and there are side effects, some of which can mean you need to take some time off from work, school or your usual activities.

I usually explain the need to take action as soon as possible by explaining the following scenario that happened at a big dance party. There was incredible laser lighting, brilliant shows and a huge crowd of men having a fantastic time. They were chatting, flirting, drinking, dancing and a few were popping the occasional recreational party drug.

There was also an area dedicated to those who wanted to have sex. It was curtained off and provided a variety of



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spaces for differing sexual engagement. The VAC had supplied thousands of safe-sex packs in 'handy to reach areas' no matter where, when or how sex was going to happen.

A guy came up to me a few hours after the party had started and asked me about PEP. He explained he had been in the sex area and someone in the darkened space had moved up behind him, slipped his jeans off and slipped his cock into his arse. The guy telling me this said he immediately reached behind him to ensure the other guy was wearing a condom — and he was.

However, when he pulled out, post-fuck, there was no condom. He was now concerned he may not have had a condom on or that it had come off inside. He was a little frantic but I calmed him down by telling him all he needed to know about PEP. I said his best bet was to go to the Alfred Hospital ASAP to see if PEP was going to be appropriate for him. He responded by saying, "I can't leave the party yet, I've only been here for an hour. I'll go later." I suggested he consider his priorities, but left it to him to decide.

info: For more on PEP visit www.getpep.info or ring 1800 889 887.



Blowing back into town

Fresh from their European tour, local homo-heroes the Blow Waves are back in Melbourne and serving up their unique brand of disco-infused punk at the Curtin Bandroom for one show only on October 15. They'll play alongside hot Sydney band Where's Jerome? and local outfit Rush in Attack. Then, on November 6 and 7, the boys are heading south to play gigs in Hobart and Launceston as part of the TasPride Festival.

info: www.theblowwaves.com www.taspride.com

Jewish Community Council speaks out

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The Jewish Community Council of Victoria has called for awareness of GLBT mental health issues.

JCCV executive director Geoffrey Zygier released a statement in time for the Jewish festival of Simchat Torah calling for discussion and reflection within the Jewish community for those facing difficulties, including those vilified for their sexual orientation.

"To live in poverty or with mental illness is to live with uncertainty, indignity and harassment... same-sex attracted people are up to 14 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers," Zygier said.

"We must encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including action by individuals, communities, organisations and governments that can make a long-term and lasting difference."

The comments coincided with Mental Health Week, held from October 4-10, and followed an earlier JCCV statement calling on the community to avoid excessive alcohol consumption during the

festival period.

Debate on levels of acceptance of homosexuality in the Melbourne Jewish community was sparked recently after gay Jewish support group Aleph said the JCCV lacked leadership in addressing GLBT issues.

Aleph convenor Michael Barnett has mooted plans for a national Jewish GLBTI advocacy body and told *Southern Star* he welcomed the JCCV's statement as a positive sign attitudes were slowly changing, but work still needs to be done.

"The JCCV has said it is not going to stand for vilification on the grounds of sexual orientation and this is a good first step," he said. "What I'd like to see is a bigger picture approach and a more proactive response on a policy level within the Council, whether it be for any marginalised group in the community, rather than there just being ad hoc or kneejerk responses."

Barnett said plans for a national body are still at the "concept stage". If established, the group would be linked to resources from health experts and academics.



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NO DRAMA!**

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Victorian
AIDS Council
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