



## *Gay men on holidays talk sex!*

**Why do we holiday? To rest, relax, get some sun, sight see... and of course to have some fun... and what better way to enjoy yourself than to indulge in some HOT sex in some far off sun-kissed Mediterranean resort.**

What you get up to on holidays is down to you. This web page gives information and tips which can help ensure your holiday leaves you with only happy memories of those long hot nights... So what can you expect from the gay Mediterranean resorts. We did our own research and asked gay men with hands on experience! And this is what they told us...

### **Condoms & sex**

Almost 40% of gay men surveyed said they had more sex on holidays.

Around half the men surveyed said they could not get condoms & lube in the resorts.

**"You'll be lucky to find any condoms, let alone lube, in the bars in Gran Canaria. At least next time I'll know to bring my own" (Francis, Playa des Ingles)**

**"You might get some condoms in Sitges, but I've been warned they're not strong enough for gay men" (Darren, Sitges)**

Did you know that strong condoms & lube are not always available in most gay Mediterranean resorts?

## **Travel Sex Tip**

**Remember that sun oils & creams are not suitable as lube. Oil causes rubber to rot and greatly increases the risk of condoms breaking. Only water based lubricant is safe. And if you're covered in sun cream, best shower before fucking! Oil up for sun not for sex!**

**Getting away from it all... doesn't mean HIV**

**"You don't see much safer sex stuff or condoms around the bars. Some guys behave as if HIV wasn't a problem here. But I've heard it's a lot worse here than at home" (Kevin, Gran Canaria)**

As you know being on holiday doesn't mean it's OK to forget about everything. HIV is still a very real problem across Europe. In some countries the number of men infected is a lot higher. Just because someone, whether a local or tourist, looks healthy, young, tanned & gorgeous doesn't mean they can't have HIV. And as in the UK, many men will not even know they have HIV or may not chose to tell you or insist on using condoms. **At home or holidaying - Assume nothing.**

## **Drink, drugs & getting carried away**

**"You know what it's like on holidays... you seem so far from home and all that... and you drink a lot more and do things you'd think twice about back home" (Simon, Mykonos)**

**11% agreed that they found it easier to forget about safer sex on holidays.**

Holidays often mean consuming pretty large quantities of alcohol, and for some getting off it on drugs. You may be used to it, but playing away from home might mean taking a bit more care. If you're up for a big night out, it's safer to stay with friends. And if you get off with a stranger it's worth telling a friend where you're going and who with or even introduce them.

**"I have taken more risks here than I would normally take. It's been non-stop clubbing and drugs for a week... I feel completely frazzled... I'm probably not as together as I usually am... " (Nigel, Ibiza)**

Have you ever used Drink or drugs as an excuse to have unsafe sex? If you can get it together to get off with someone, you should be up to pulling out a condom when the moment comes.

**"Coming from a town with just one gay bar, I did feel like a kid in a sweet shop. I don't really know why I didn't use a condom - its never happened before. I suppose I just got carried away with everything. I was having a ball in Sitges, this guy was absolutely gorgeous... I don't know... I suppose I just wanted to forget about everything else" (Justin, Sitges)**

30% reported that they had as many or more new sexual partners on one holiday than they had at home during the whole year

**"I've had a lot more sex here than I get back home. It's just much easier. The sand dunes are always busy! And back rooms are really big here. " (Neil, Maspalomas)**

## **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

The risk of HIV transmission can be higher if you have an untreated Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) - a few cases of HIV transmission through sucking have occurred in men with gonorrhoea of the throat (though picking up HIV through sucking is very unlikely). If you do get an STI on holidays get it sorted as soon as you can. If symptoms are bad you may need to visit a local hospital. Some STI's can go unnoticed with no visible symptoms. If left untreated STI's can damage your health and may be more severe if you have HIV. Regular 6 monthly check-ups at an STI Clinic are advisable.

**As many as 17% believed they picked up an STI while on holidays.**

Remember to fill out an E111 form, free from the post office, before you travel - to ensure you get free medical treatment if you're ill (including STI treatment) in other EC countries.

# Travel Sex Tip

Being in a gay resort can mean that sex is available 24 hours! It may happen quite unexpectedly - so be prepared and carry condoms & lube wherever you go. And if you're on holidays with your partner or boyfriend, it may be an idea to talk about some "rules" before setting off.

## What you need to know about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) to help you stay healthy.

Most other STIs are far less serious than HIV and are easily treated (hepatitis is the main exception). But they can be more easy to pick up and often go unnoticed. However don't panic! - STIs aren't that common and are only really problematic if left untreated. Early detection and treatment is important for everyone, but more so if you have HIV. Free and confidential check-ups and treatment is available from STI Clinics. The following are the main STIs affecting gay men. Condoms will give you good protection against many STIs, but not all. If there are sores, rashes or any signs of infection on your own or partner's body, avoid any body contact with the affected area. If possible get advice (see back page) about how infectious it is and whether it is possible to safely use protection and have sex.

**Hepatitis A and B:** are serious infections which can cause chronic liver disease and major illness. Hep B can be picked up from rimming, sucking, unprotected fucking and water sports.

Hep A through rimming. Also spread through contaminated water and poor food hygiene.

Both A and B are preventable through vaccinations.

Hep B vaccination is free from STD clinics.

Hep A and B are very common among gay men

**Get vaccinated as soon as possible**

If you've been vaccinated check to see you still have resistance (lasts 3 - 5 years).

There is no real treatment for hepatitis - can involve a change of lifestyle to stay well.

**NSU and Gonorrhoea:** are common problems affecting the tube in the cock and sometimes arse and throat, normally involves burning sensation when pissing and discharge (white creamy substance from cock) or a sore throat.

Often there are no symptoms.

Unprotected fucking, sucking and rimming are the most common ways of transmitting bacterial infections.

Easily treated with antibiotics.

**Herpes:** can cause sores around the mouth, cock and arse.

Can be passed on through body contact with the infected area.

Touching the sores yourself can spread the virus to other parts of your body.

No cure and can be difficult to treat - an antiviral cream called acyclovir can help, but herpes can often recur.

**Syphilis:** often no symptoms; only detected in STI clinic

May develop sores or rashes around (& inside) cock, genital area, arse & throat.

Passed on by contact with sores or rashes (sometimes hidden inside arse) easily treated with antibiotics - but early detection is essential.

**Wart viruses:** appear on the cock and inside the arse and sometimes around mouth

Transmitted by skin contact treated in a number of ways, often burnt off with a chemical or frozen.

**Crabs and Scabies:** small insects picked up by sexual contact easily treated with lotion from chemist or clinic.

If you have any worries about STIs, HIV or safer sex, you may want to get more advice. Our information pages have contact numbers for some confidential helplines. They also list local clinic numbers - ask to see a health adviser - all information you give is strictly confidential.

If you're sexually active 6 monthly check-ups at a STI clinic are recommended - even if you have no symptoms.

## Tips for travellers who are HIV positive

Planning ahead and a few basic precautions will help you have a hassle-free holiday.

**Crossing the border.** The countries of Southern Europe have no entry restrictions for you if you are planning a short stay, and don't intend working or studying there.

**Vaccinations.** No special vaccinations are needed for European resorts, but whether travelling or staying at home, it's a good idea to be vaccinated against:

**Tetanus-** picked up through cuts and scratches. A booster injection is needed ten years after your first jab.

**Hepatitis** - liver diseases which can make you very ill (see the previous section on STIs). With Hepatitis B, you could be more infectious to others than someone without HIV would be. You could also be at greater risk of becoming a long-term carrier of the Hepatitis B virus.

All gay men should be offered free vaccinations against Hepatitis B at STI clinics. You may also be able to get an Hepatitis A vaccination.

Whilst these vaccinations are safe for you, your HIV infection might affect how long you will have immunity, or whether you develop it at all. A vaccination will affect your immune system for 4 to 6 weeks. It may increase your HIV viral load, making you potentially more infectious.

### Eating and drinking

Particularly if your CD4 count is under 200, you should:

Boil your drinking water and milk, even bottled mineral water.

Avoid ice cubes unless the water has been boiled first, and ice cream made from local water or from unpasteurised milk or cream.

Avoid food sold on the street, undercooked meat or seafood, and make sure fruits and vegetables have been washed and peeled.

### Travel insurance

Standard travel insurance, even when sold by gay travel firms won't cover you for HIV-related illness, though it will cover you for accidents or stolen luggage. You can get travel insurance that will cover HIV-related illness. The THT Helpline has details of suitable travel insurance policies.

### Travelling with anti-HIV drugs.

Before you travel, get advice from your treatment centre.

Take a few extra days supply.

Leave the labels on your medication in case customs are suspicious.

Take a letter from your doctor stating they are for a 'chronic illness'.

Even so, customs might recognise the drugs as HIV treatments.

You could post your drugs ahead to a safe address, but make sure they've arrived before you go.

Buying your drugs abroad may be very expensive, if they are available at all.

Contact an AIDS organisation where you are going to find out what the local situation is.

The Terrence Higgins Trust Helpline has more information about travel for people with HIV.

## Happy memories!

"I feel really good about the holiday and I suppose myself. I sometimes get a bit down on myself at home... but I just went for it... and feel much better for it, you know, it really boosts your confidence... it was great and yeah it was safe." (Jamie, Benidorm)

"Having HIV means I've had to take a bit more care of myself out here than my mates. But it's worth it, 'coz I've now got only good memories to take home... I've taken care of myself - and that also means no-one else will have HIV as a holiday souvenir from me." (Paul, Sitges)

