

You should test for HIV annually, or more often if you have casual/new partners or have been diagnosed with an STI.

Consider the following recommendations to reduce your risk of STIs and BBVs to you and your partner(s):

- Negotiate safety with your partner(s) and discuss the acceptable levels of risk for everyone involved.
- Use barriers such as gloves, dental dams and condoms with body parts and sex toys; many sexual health clinics and other health care facilities offer these free-of-charge.
- If you're using sex toys, clean before sharing with a partner, and use a new condom for each partner or between penetration of different body openings.
- Avoid oral sex if either of you has any cuts or sores in the mouth or on the lips.
- Use a condom and/or a dental dam for oral sex acts, to prevent orally transmitted STIs.
- Be aware that the use of alcohol and drugs before or during sex, sharing needles, and some BDSM/kink activities may involve a greater level of risk and requires negotiation.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B, and HPV (though the latter is only covered by Public Health for MSM who are 26 years old or younger). Some infections can be transmitted by hands, fingers, and mutual vulval rubbing. Wash your hands before and after sex.
- Wear latex gloves and use plenty of water-based lubricant for vaginal and anal fisting.
- If you are HIV negative, ask your health care provider whether PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) or PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) would be helpful for you for HIV prevention.
- To reduce the risk of unplanned pregnancy, use a condom, other barrier method, or talk to your health care provider about options.

## RELATIONSHIP SAFETY AND HEALTH

Intimate partner violence is physical or sexual violence, stalking, or emotional or psychological abuse by a current or former partner. If your partner treats you in a way that makes you feel unsafe or bad about yourself, depressed or anxious; if your partner harasses and follows you; controls your money, where you go and who you see; if your partner threatens you; if your partners hits, punches or kicks you or forces you to engage in sexual activity against your will - don't suffer in silence.

If you feel unsafe or have experienced abuse or violence in your relationship, you can seek support from a health care provider, a counsellor, or a crisis line. If there is any possibility that your partner(s) would access the same support services as you, especially in a small community, let the service provider know.



**Find support and help**  
Ontario Victim Support Line  
1-888-579-2888


Assaulted Women's Helpline  
[awhl.org](http://awhl.org)  
Toll-free: 1-866-863-0511

## ADDITIONAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES

Visit [rainbowhealthontario.ca/2slgbtq-health-resources](http://rainbowhealthontario.ca/2slgbtq-health-resources) or scan this code with your mobile device:



This brochure was created by Rainbow Health Ontario (RHO). A program of Sherbourne Health, RHO creates opportunities for the healthcare system to better serve 2SLGBTQ communities.

 [RainbowHealthOntario.ca](http://RainbowHealthOntario.ca)  
 [twitter.com/RainbowHealthOn](https://twitter.com/RainbowHealthOn)  
 [facebook.com/RainbowHealthOntario](https://facebook.com/RainbowHealthOntario)

Health care providers can visit [Learn.RainbowHealthOntario.ca](http://Learn.RainbowHealthOntario.ca) to find out more about our courses designed to increase competency in serving 2SLGBTQ service users.



# about bisexual health

Bisexual people and people who have sex with both men and women are a diverse group and have many of the same health care needs as the general population, but they also have specific health care needs.

Your health is influenced by many factors beyond sexual orientation and practices.

Discrimination, racism, and negative attitudes towards bisexual people are not uncommon and may be experienced when seeking health care.

Rainbow Health Ontario has created this brochure to highlight some health issues that may concern bisexual people.



rainbow health ontario  
SHERBOURNE HEALTH

## TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

Bisexual people have different lived experiences than gay or lesbian people, and those experiences result in different health outcomes. Bisexual people make up a significant population of the 2SLGBTQ community and yet experience substantially higher rates of physical, sexual, social and emotional violence and disparities than gay and straight people, as well as worse physical, mental and social health.

Being healthy means taking care of your physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and spiritual needs. While it can be difficult to come out about your sexual orientation or gender to your health care provider, being your authentic self can be liberating and promote good health and wellbeing.

Don't delay or avoid seeking services because you had negative experiences, or are concerned about discrimination, stigma, confidentiality, your immigration status, or other factors. Getting regular check-ups and care from a bi-positive and informed care provider is important for staying healthy.

### TIPS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF HEALTH CARE YOU RECEIVE

- Educate yourself about possible health concerns, risks, and options for bisexual people. Your race or ethnicity may also increase your risk of certain diseases and conditions.
- Seek out health care providers and spaces that are bi-positive.
- Visit potential providers and ask questions You have every right to know what training and experience your provider has in 2SLGBTQ care.
- Listen for how the provider speaks with you and whether you are encouraged to talk openly about your sexuality and any concerns. If your provider seems open but uninformed, you can suggest Rainbow Health Ontario's courses designed to increase the 2SLGBTQ competency of health care providers.
- Bring a support person with you to your appointment.
- If you feel safe, identify yourself as bisexual so that you can be open about discussing the issues that are of concern to you. This may help your provider better understand how to help you stay healthy.
- If you do not feel comfortable with a provider, look for another.

## FINDING A HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL

Ask other 2SLGBTQ people for recommendations about health care providers and services. Several large cities now have health care centres that provide comprehensive, 2SLGBTQ- competent care. If there are few providers in your region, look into accessing providers via the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN).

### RHO Service Provider Directory

[rainbowhealthontario.ca/lgbt2sq-health/service-provider-directory/](https://rainbowhealthontario.ca/lgbt2sq-health/service-provider-directory/)

## HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH USING ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, DRUGS

Some studies suggest that use of tobacco, alcohol and other recreational drugs may be higher among 2SLGBTQ individuals when compared to the general population.

If you use tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, learning about the effects and side effects can help make your use safer. There are many types of harm reduction and cessation programs. Your health care provider can help you choose one that's right for you.

## CANCER SCREENING

Screening can stop cancer before it starts or can detect cancer in its early stages, at which point it is more treatable and/or curable.

Who should get screened?

- Individuals should be screened for cancer based on the organs that they have (e.g. prostate, testicles, cervix, breasts, colon), rather than based their gender identity or sexual orientation/practices.
- Anyone with breast tissue is at risk for breast cancer and should be screened according to guidelines. Make sure you are enrolled in the Ontario Breast Screening Program, which may not happen automatically depending on your gender on file.
- Regular screenings for cervical, prostate, testicular and colon cancer may be recommended based on age and risk; screening for prostate or testicular cancer may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Some providers recommend that people who have anal sex get regular anal pap screening, though this is not currently widely available.

Speak to your general practitioner about cancer screening. You have the right to receive screening that is appropriate for you. If you don't have a general practitioner, there are some screenings that are available without a referral.

## YOUR EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Your mental health is influenced by your sense of self-worth and the level of stress you experience, as well as the acceptance and inclusiveness of spaces where you live, work and play. While many bisexual people have good mental health, studies show they have higher rates of mental health distress than monosexual, gay, and lesbian people including suicidality, substance use disorders, depression, and anxiety.

Homophobic/biphobic social environments can have negative effects on your health. The burdens of stress and discrimination may be heightened for bisexual people who have had significant exposure to trauma, are Indigenous, racialized, or are living with a disability. Developing a positive sexual identity can be particularly challenging for bisexual adolescents because of homophobia/biphobia, monosexual bias in the educational curriculum, lack of role models, poor family acceptance, and support.

## MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Having a supportive group of friends and family members (whether family of origin or chosen family) who understand and affirm your sexuality is often key to successfully dealing with the stress of day-to-day life and maintaining good mental health.

You can also find support by:

- Getting involved in community and social groups.
- Exploring various coping strategies to deal with stresses and manage self-care, such as meditation, physical activity, and activities you enjoy.
- Seeking mental health counseling and support groups that are sensitive to the needs of bisexual people.

## BODY IMAGE AND HEALTH

Body image, or the way that you view your own body, is something that impacts people of all shapes, sizes, colors, sexualities, and genders. However, there are unique ways that individuals in the 2SLGBTQ community experience and confront issues of body image. The 2SLGBTQ community is disproportionately affected by eating disorders. 2SLGBTQ youth are at higher risk for eating disorders than their monosexual peers. Nutrition and weight concerns can become unhealthy if they make you feel depressed, cause physical harm, develop eating disorders, or put you at further risk for chronic health diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

## SEXUAL HEALTH

If you're having sex, there are ways to do it safely so you're protecting yourself and others. You should feel safe, empowered, and have the kind of sex you want. You should never be pushed into anything that you are uncomfortable with.

The relatively high incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in bisexual people may be influenced by multiple factors, including individual behaviors, the number of lifetime or recent sex partners, rate of partner exchange, and frequency of condomless sex.

A person's risk of exposure to STIs and blood-borne viruses (BBVs) depends on the body parts and fluids involved in sexual activity with another person, rather than a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. STIs are spread through sexual contact with someone who has an STI. Sexual contact includes oral, anal, and vaginal sex, as well as genital skin-to-skin contact.

Viruses and infections like HIV, chlamydia, and gonorrhea are spread through sexual fluids, like semen. HIV and hepatitis B are also spread through blood. Genital herpes, syphilis, and human papillomavirus (HPV) are most often spread through genital skin-to-skin contact. When discussing your sexual health with a health care provider, make sure to describe your sexual behaviour and ask about the risks of specific sex acts.