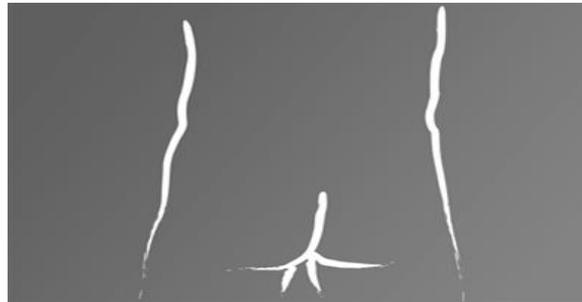


## Looking After Your Rear End ...anal self-examination



### Why is this important?

Anal cancer and anal pre-cancer (also known as anal intra-epithelial neoplasia or AIN) are more common amongst people living with HIV with the highest risks in HIV positive men who have sex with men (MSM).

It is between 40-80 times more common in MSM compared to the rest of the population and up to 135 times more common in MSM who are living with HIV.

### What causes anal cancer?

It is mainly caused by **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)**. HPV is transmitted through direct skin to skin contact. It is very common, and, in most cases, harmless. Most men and women will have an HPV infection at some time during their lives, usually without even knowing it. In many cases, the immune system will clear the infection within two years, but in some cases, persistent infection may continue. This can lead to changes in cells (called dysplasia) at the site of infection which can over time develop into cancer. HPV can cause cancer of the mouth and throat, vulva, vagina, cervix, anus and penis. The majority of HPV associated cancers are linked to just two types of HPV: HPV16 and 18 (called high risk HPV).

### Is there a screening test for anal cancer?

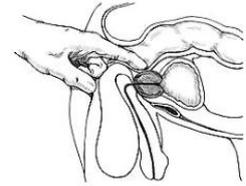
Currently there is no national screening programme for detecting anal cancer and pre-cancer. However, abnormal changes can be identified on examination. For this reason, it is recommended the HIV-positive MSM should perform self-examination regularly, and report any changes to their doctor. This leaflet will explain how you can do this.

### What are the symptoms of AIN or anal cancer?

Symptoms include bleeding, itching, lumps (warts or similar), sores that don't heal, discharge, pain or pressure in the rectum. If you notice any of these, tell your doctor.

### How do I self-examine my anus?

- Whilst in the shower, reach around your back and gently insert your index finger inside your anus/bottom. You may wish to use an examination glove and some lubrication.
- Slowly rotate your finger around. Check for any lumps, bumps or sore areas.
- On the floor, sit down with your knees up in front of a mirror.
- Lay back slightly so you can see your anus.
- Examine the outside of the area and then with your fingers push the anus open to look for any bleeding or swelling.
- Always wash your hands after self-examination.



### What are the symptoms of AIN or anal cancer?

- Smoking increases your risk of developing anal cancer. Cut down or best of all quit. Speak to one of the HIV clinical team or contact [www.livewelldorset.co.uk](http://www.livewelldorset.co.uk) (Freephone 0800 840 1628) for support.
- Tell us if you're worried about any symptoms you have noticed or found. There is no need to be embarrassed.
- Have regular sexual health screening with an examination. This may help us to pick up problems early on.
- Using condoms for receiving anal sex (being the "bottom" / underneath) will reduce the risk of acquiring HPV.
- The HPV vaccine will protect against infection with certain types of HPV, although it may not help if you have already been infected. Talk to one of the HPV team about this.

### What happens next?

If anal cancer or pre-cancer is suspected, you will be referred to a specialist team for a more detailed examination called anoscopy, further investigation and treatment.

### References

European AIDS Clinical Society (EACS) guidelines 2019 p52. Prevention and management of co-morbidities in HIV positive persons. Cancer: Screening methods  
<http://www.eacsociety.org/guidelines/eacs-guidelines/eacs-guidelines.html>

2008 UK National guidelines for the management of the sexual and reproductive health of people living with HIV  
<https://www.bhiva.org/SRH-guidelines>

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