

HIV/AIDS

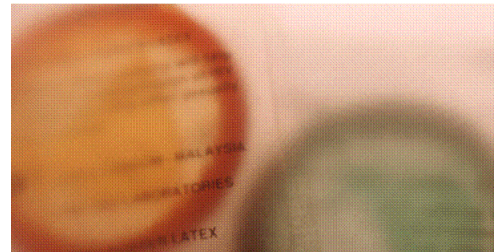
At least 60% of new infections among Aboriginal peoples in Canada are women. A lot of them are Two Spirit women. A person can get HIV from sharing needles, unprotected sexual contact and from vertical transmission (HIV positive mother to child when the mother is pregnant or during birth). Only one in four babies could get HIV from their mother, and with treatment of HAART, it goes down to only 1%.

Two Spirit women can still be at risk. It is not who you identify as, but what you do. There are some Two Spirit women who still have sex with men, and if a condom or barrier is not used, they are at risk. There are Two Spirit women who use substances and might share needles in the process. For women who are in prison, sharing needles for drugs, tattooing, or piercing is a huge risk as a needle can be shared between many people.

“Homophobia present(s) a huge obstacle to our prevention efforts, (and) it also serves to increase the stigma and isolation experienced by HIV positive Aboriginal two spirit people”(Zoccole, Ristock and Barlow 1). For Two Spirit Women living with HIV, they have to face the additional stigma because they are thought to be the least at risk (because of assumptions about their sexual activities and drug use) and because they were initially at the front lines of the epidemic and therefore, they should have known better. Getting HIV does not mean that a person is bad it just means that they came into contact with another person who has HIV. It is a virus.

A huge risk factor for everyone is falling in love. We want to believe that trust and intimacy is sacred and will keep us safe. We live in a world and time where we cannot rely on that alone to prevent HIV transmission.

Two Spirit women have been in the trenches since the beginning of HIV and have been and continue to be caregivers for those who have HIV and AIDS. Everyone is affected by HIV and AIDS. Those who are living with it: friends, families and the community at large. We need to change the way we relate and act with one another to stop the spread of HIV among our people. Using condoms, gloves and latex barriers during sexual contact, and practicing Harm Reduction are good places to start.



Harm Reduction in the Aboriginal Community is a creative approach and practice that strives to preserve our people and cultures by encouraging and maintaining balance. Harm Reduction approaches work toward reducing harm and risk in the presence of substance use. Handing out needles and glass pipes for crack use are both Harm Reduction methods. Keeping someone alive longer and safer from HIV infection is a long term goal and more realistic than merely insisting that people abstain from using substances.