Closing the Gap in Healthcare - Tips for CofC College Students

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Ashley: “Hey Jasmine. They are having free STD tests at the student center. Do you wanna go?”
Jasmine: “Girl, I don’t need one. My boyfriend and I are monogamous, and he told me that he’s clean; so, I have nothing to worry about.”
Ashley: “How can you be so sure? Have you seen his papers?”
Jasmine: “What papers?”
Ashley: “Let’s walk and talk…..”

Unfortunately, this is the mindset of many females in today’s society. Did you know that about half of the reported cases of HIV/AIDS are African Americans? Of the female cases reported, 64% were African American. The number one cause for women and men contracting Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the same—having sex with infected men. That’s right ladies! Your partner/significant other/spouse may be sleeping with other men, known as “Down Low” brothers. They are a population of men that is growing rapidly. But sisters, we are here to let you know that it is IMPERATIVE that you get tested and insist that your mate gets tested as well. Don’t be a Jasmine! When entering a new relationship, be sure to look at his “papers”. And by “papers”, we mean official documentation stating that he has been tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

How do I make sure I stay clean?
1. Always practice safe sex.
   There are many different types of condoms that are suited for EVERYONE. Condoms come in all shapes, sizes, and textures, and are available for both genders. Ladies it is not just the males’ responsibility to provide condoms. Even for those who are allergic to latex, there are polyurethane condoms made just for you.
2. NEVER double glove.
   Using two condoms causes friction, which produces heat and can cause the condom to break.
3. You can still contract STDs from oral sex.
   Dental dams and oral sex condoms are also available to help keep you protected during fellatio.
4. Keep your sex toys clean.

HIV/AIDS is not the only issue!
   Any genital symptoms such as an unusual sore, discharge with odor, burning during urination, or bleeding between menstrual cycles could be indicative of an STD. There are
several other sexually transmitted diseases that you could be at risk of contracting if you don’t practice safe sex. Here are some fast facts about some common sexually transmitted diseases.

1. **Syphilis**
   - **Symptoms:** Painless sores on the penis, vagina, anus, rectum, lips or in the mouth.
   - **Transmission:** Passed from person to person through direct contact with syphilis sore or mother-to-child during vaginal childbirth.
   - **Protection:** Syphilis occurs in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by a latex condom, as well as in areas that are not covered. Use of a condom can reduce the risk of syphilis only when the infected area or site of potential exposure is protected. So it is important to only engage in sexual activity with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected.

2. **Gonorrhea**
   - **Symptoms:** Burning sensation when urinating or a white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis in males. The symptoms in women include a painful or burning sensation when urinating, increased vaginal discharge, or vaginal bleeding between periods. Symptoms can take as long as 30 days to appear.
   - **Transmission:** Passed from person to person through contact with the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus or from mother to child during vaginal childbirth. Ejaculation does not have to occur for gonorrhea to be transmitted or acquired.
   - **Protection:** Only engage in sexual activity with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Correct and consistent use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of Gonorrhea.

3. **Chlamydia**
   - **Symptoms:** Chlamydia is known as a "silent" disease because many people show no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1 to 3 weeks after exposure and will include discharge or a burning sensation when urinating. Lower abdominal pain, low back pain, nausea, fever, pain during intercourse, or bleeding between menstrual periods may also be present in women.
   - **Transmission:** Chlamydia can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex and can be passed from a mother to her baby during vaginal childbirth.
   - **Protection:** Only engage in sexual activity with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Correct and consistent use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of Chlamydia.

4. **Genital Herpes (Herpes Simplex Virus-Types 1 or 2)**
   - **Symptoms:** Most individuals have no or only minimal signs or symptoms. Those who do have symptoms experience clusters of small fluid-filled blisters around the infected area that break, forming painful sores that crust and heal. This process can take several days. Some people get only a rash or small bumps on the skin that appear to be pimples. Still, others have different symptoms, such as painful urination, and some women have fluid discharge from the vagina. One person may have an outbreak once a year, while another may have one every few weeks. Before a flare-up, a person may notice an itching, tingling, or burning sensation in the affected area, and there may be sharp pains in the pelvis or down
The leg. Herpes sores are usually worst the first time they appear. In later outbreaks the sores tend to be less painful and last for a shorter period of time.

- **Transmission:** HSV-1 and HSV-2 can be found in and released from the sores that the viruses cause, but they also are released between outbreaks from skin that does not appear to have a sore. Generally, a person can only get HSV-2 infection during sexual contact with someone who has a genital HSV-2 infection. Transmission can occur from an infected partner who does not have a visible sore and may not know that he or she is infected.

- **Protection:** Only engage in sexual activity with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Correct and consistent use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of genital herpes.

Remember that it is up to you to be in control of your sexual health. Make sure that you always protect yourself and your health. If you don’t, then no one else will. GET TESTED and demand that your partner does, too. Don’t be afraid to get tested together because the sexual decisions you make now will determine your future.

**Where can I go to get tested?**

1. Your local physician
2. Charleston Private HIV Herpes and STD testing: (843) 303-9533
3. North Charleston Private HIV Herpes and STD testing: (843) 303-9533
4. HIV&STD Testing Specialists: (800) 805-7837

DON’T FORGET…Your partner may not always have your best interest at hand. Let’s talk about a “down low” secret that your partner may be keeping from you.

The number of “brothas” on the “down-low” is on the rise. A “down-low brotha” is any man in heterosexual relationship who has sex with other men—unbeknownst to his wife or girlfriend—and who does not identify as gay or bisexual. This rise in incidence is partially to blame for the rise in heterosexual transmission of HIV/AIDS in the black community—especially in black women. Without disclosure of sexual practices and without the use of safer sex practices, this trend is certain to continue.

While there has been no data to confirm HIV risk behavior associated with these men, what is clear is that women, men, and children of minority races and ethnicities are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. To reverse this trend, people need to protect themselves and others from getting or transmitting HIV. Being on the down-low makes it that much more difficult.

- Only You Can Make a Determination About Your Relationship. Trust your instinct. Don’t be afraid to have suspicions.
- Do Your Research.
- Ask Him About His Sexuality and Sexual History.
- Be Open to All Possibilities.
- Protect Yourself, Practice Safe Sex!