

Polyamory Concerns with STDs

By Serolynne

Any non-monogamous lifestyle presents increased risks with STDs and unintentional pregnancy - whether it be cheating, swinging, polyamory, DADT ('don't ask to don't tell'), etc. It is through polyamory's premise of open and honest communication that we have the power to be aware of the risks we are taking and consciously negotiate with our partner(s) to find an appropriate level of risk that is comfortable for everyone. We can require pre-informed consent of new partners, insist on using condoms and even limit the activities and potential exposure we take on with each partner.

When you're dating on your own, you pretty much only need to be concerned with yourself. However, when you're involved with polyamory and potentially have multiple committed partners, you suddenly have a responsibility to more people than just yourself. These people you're involved with are loved by you, and they have placed their trust in you. If anyone in your group brings home a STD, it affects everyone in the group. Once you start just one or two new relationships, more than likely that network of people you're linked to sexually can become quite large. That means one STD infection can impact a whole lot of people.

That's a lot of doctor's expense for testing and treatments, a lot of anxiety and a lot of health concern going on. It could be months to years before your group has rid itself of an infection - or it could be a lifetime sentence if you're unfortunate enough to contract something like HIV, HSV or HPV.

You need to be discussing with the people in your group what their levels of STD concern are. You may be surprised to find out that someone you've been involved with for a long time has a very different perspective than you do.

Some things you and your network need to determine include:

- How often will everyone get tested for STDs?
- What STDs will be tested for?
- How will STD results be shared?

- How will new partners be considered?
- Will they need to be approved, or is everyone allowed to take on new partners without pre-informing?
- How far can you go with a new partner before you need to stop and talk with your other partners?
- Are condoms good enough for new partners?
- Will you require STD results?
- Sexual history exchange?

- How will pregnancy be handled in your group?
- Will you want paternity testing done?
- Or will there be an assumed father?
- What are the views on abortion of those in the group?
- Who will be responsible for costs and raising of the child?
- Who gets child custody?

These things need to be discussed BEFORE an unintended pregnancy should occur. Birth control methods have a tendency to fail at the most inconvenient times.