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Being open is a risk
This fear persists today. Medical studies indicate between 36 and 54 University students likely are infected with the HIV virus, but while this article was being prepared, no HIV-positive students were willing to come forward and talk about it, even anonymously.

"Anonymity is kind of a cloak, depending on who you are," explained Tadd Tobias, the Willamette AIDS Council outreach director who counsels some students with HIV. "What may seem to me as safe, someone in a position who has so much to lose may not view that as safe."

"There's still the thing of: Maybe someone will figure this out when they read the newspaper," he added. "Maybe someone will think 'Oh, That's Person X. He must have AIDS. No wonder he is losing weight.'"

And students with HIV have a lot to lose in Eugene if their medical status is recognized, Tobias said.

"People face the potential of losing their jobs," he said. "It may not even be that the employer is worried about ... safety. It's more often 'Our customers won't come here anymore if they know there's an employee working here who has AIDS.'"

Even though it's illegal to discriminate against people with HIV, these people still hide their medical status from their employers for good reason, said Emily Heilbrun, a local attorney and the interim client services coordinator for Shanti in Oregon, an AIDS support and counseling service.

"Being open is a big risk to take, particularly if you've just found out you have a big, potentially expensive illness and think you may be laid off from your job," Heilbrun said. "All the laws that protect people with disabilities protect people with AIDS, but it's just if you want to fight the battle or not."

Living with HIV
"These people lose houses, too," Tobias said, noting that landlords won't renew leases because "if people find out there's a person with AIDS living in that house, that house could become a target for vandalism."

Students who are HIV positive and live in the dorms may face even rougher living condi-

tions, Tobias said. "The roommate may refuse to live there or may be physically or emotionally abusive to that person," he said. "He can lose his friends, his emotional support team. And if he is a freshman, he will feel even

"I don't want to put out that people have to be gay to get AIDS," he said. "But the reality is that the majority of people who are affected with the virus and living with the disease are gay men."

And these people have to

'The sense of hopelessness begins to set in. Why should John work? Why should John go to school if John can't get a job?'
— Tadd Tobias

more isolated and out of touch."

In addition, students with HIV who are also gay, lesbian or bisexual face even more intense discrimination.

deal with homophobia as well as AIDS-phobia, said Gay and Lesbian Alliance volunteer Meridith Myllenbeck.

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