

Rolling "public sex environments" around Portland isn't new for Cascade AIDS Project. The nonprofit agency probably has seen more dick than a urologist. But its efforts to promote safer sex have begun to heat up with this month's opening of Steam Portland, an eastside gay bathhouse.

For years, outreach work of the Men's Prevention and Wellness Program at CAP has focused on a ménage à trois with the Multnomah County Health Department and the venerable Club Portland. Free condoms and lube are offered like candy. Signs reinforce Club Portland's official ban on barebacking (unprotected anal sex), a rule to which members also agree in writing upon joining.

Twice a month, CAP volunteers staff an office at the downtown bathhouse. They mingle with guests to offer safer-sex kits and vouchers for county-administered HIV/STD testing. They safely dispose of used needles. They answer questions like, Are blowjobs safe? What happens to my health care without Measure 28? What's with this syphilis thing? And, once a month, they hook up with a county staffer who offers onsite HIV/STD testing.

Perhaps most importantly, CAP's persistent presence serves as a reminder to guests that anonymous sex in public isn't a free-for-all gangbang without rules. Or condoms. Or consequences.

## PUTTING OUT IN PUBLIC

CAP reaches out to Portland's gay bathhouses to help guys get off without getting hurt by Timothy Krause

**RULES OF THE ROAD**  
A valid photo ID plus your membership card is required for entry. Sorry, no in and out privileges.

**ALCOHOL and ILLEGAL DRUGS are NOT permitted in the club. You will be denied entry if you are "under the influence."**

**BAREBACKING is NOT allowed.**  
If you fuck without a condom, you will be asked to leave.

No glass containers in the showers, steam room, or spa area.  
Street clothes are not permitted in the play areas.  
Sexy sweats are available or you can wear your towel.  
Flip-flops are also available for footwear.  
Nudity and fetish wear are encouraged.

Wash with soap and water after you play.

Cum on me, not in me!  
Don't take other guys' cum into your body. Taking cum in your mouth or swallowing it puts you at risk for infection.

Safe sex supplies are provided in all play areas.  
No oil-based lubricants or Crisco are allowed.

Feel free to let someone know you are hot for him.  
If he isn't hot for you, move on. When someone comes on to you and you aren't interested, be firm but courteous. You just got a compliment.

Our staff is friendly and here to make you comfortable.  
Please feel free to ask for their assistance.  
We ask you to respect their work, hands off!

Steam Portland is not responsible for any liability incurred by an act or omission of its employees, officers, agents, representatives or members.

**FULL STEAM AHEAD!**

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Earlier this month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the number of new HIV infections and AIDS cases across the country had risen for the first time in a decade. Coupled with concerns of syphilis outbreaks and drug-resistant bacterial infections among gay men, the issue of public safety now has CAP redoubling its efforts to ensure that public sex is also safer sex.

Downtown, for example, CAP's twice-monthly sojourns to Club Portland now will increase to weekly forays. And while these safer-sex studs won't be offering onsite testing or walking around Steam's new complex, owner David Anderson began working with CAP early

in his business planning process to establish a ban on risky behavior, alcohol and illegal drugs.

But even with the cooperation and encouragement of bathhouse operators, getting gay guys to change their sexual habits is not easy.

Public sex environments have a reputation for being places where it's OK to break the rules, says Philip Knowlton, a program coordinator with CAP. And, when it comes to promoting safer sex, gay men are jaded. Most know how to use a condom. So, the goal now is one of motivation.

In addition to a more frequent presence, Knowlton promotes ongoing sex-talk, not just with bathhouse businessmen but also with their towel-tenting guests. Talking with one guy for 15 minutes has more impact than handing out safer-sex kits to 30 guys who are just in and out of the office. "The condoms end up on the floor and they just take the lube," observes Knowlton.

Although respectful of its relationship with bathhouse owners, CAP says it is ultimately the responsibility of Club Portland and Steam Portland staff to enforce their barebacking bans.

"If you don't have the manpower to walk around and police, it's going to be hard to do," Knowlton acknowledges. "And it's not up to CAP. We're not going to be the sex police. Even if we saw something like a huge barebacking orgy, our hands are tied."

CAP will call such activity to the attention of bathhouse bosses, but to be effective, these

establishments must have long-term employees who are trained about HIV, charged to identify inappropriate behavior and empowered to give offenders the boot.

And that can be a risky proposition. Because bathhouses are businesses, owners tread a fine line between keeping their customers healthy and happy. Too dominant, and customers go elsewhere. Too submissive, and establishments jeopardize their license to operate and the vitality of their customer base.

"But it's not public sex environments that we're concerned about," states Knowlton, who thinks Internet chat rooms pose a greater threat. "You can go to a bathhouse and have safe sex. A lot of people do, and that's great. We really are confident in management who have taken proactive steps, because it's in their best interest."

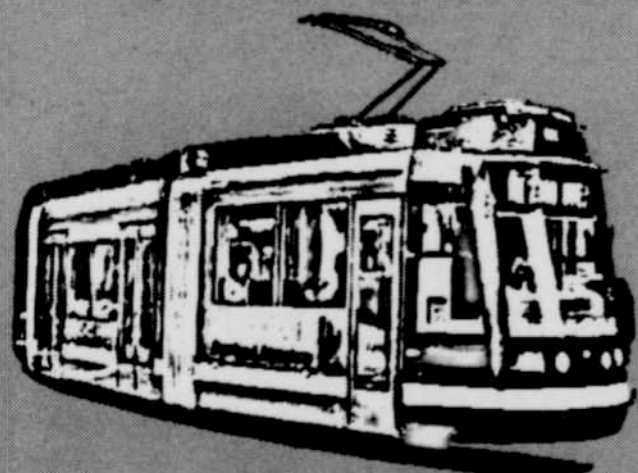
The larger issue, he suggests, has to do with the gay male community letting down its guard and becoming complacent in the face of physical danger from unsafe sexual activity.

"It's not the venues. It's not the buildings. It's not the businesses," Knowlton remarks. "It's the perception in the community that we've really made anonymous, unprotected sex the goal. It's the hottest thing that you can do. A lot of guys say they don't buy into it, but they do. It's the gay community's sexual attitudes—not the bathhouse as a business—that's a problem." □

Contact CASCADE AIDS PROJECT at 503-223-5907 or [www.casecdaids.org](http://www.casecdaids.org). CLUB PORTLAND is located at 303 S.W. 12th Ave. or [www.clubpdx.com](http://www.clubpdx.com). Find STEAM PORTLAND at 2885 N.E. Sandy Blvd. or [www.steamportland.com](http://www.steamportland.com).

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