

**speak out**

**just asking**

*In response to the alarming rise of sexually transmitted diseases among queer men, should the Multnomah County Health Department consider regulating Portland sex clubs? Why or why not?*

No, the Multnomah County Health Department should not regulate the clubs; if we want government to stay out of our sex lives, then we shouldn't invite it in. On the other hand, I'm astonished at the idiocy out there. And annoyed: These same people are probably banging the drum for government health care, expecting the rest of us to pick up the very expensive tab for their irresponsible behavior. Think again....

ALAN BATIE  
Beaverton

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Regulation sounds awfully scary—generally not a good idea. And how could they possibly? Would there be "hall monitors" walking around handing out detention slips or penalty cards? What's the next step—regulating hetero sex to prevent unwanted pregnancies? Hey, maybe that's not such a bad idea....

On the other hand, I really appreciate the health department's efforts to publicize the problem. I, for one, am staying away from casual sex for the moment—even though it's very difficult for a singleton like me who relies on such occasional encounters to alleviate the monotony of masturbation.

And another thing: No fair that a (relatively) small group of slutty barebackers is making casual sex more dangerous for the rest of us. I wish people would realize that, yes, we are all responsible for our own decisions but that sex doesn't happen in a bubble. The ghosts of all your past and future sex partners are there with you every time.

CHRISTOPHER CUTTONE  
Portland

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No. The patrons of these clubs are adults and as such are responsible for their own bodies and therefore should be aware of what the risks are and how they can protect themselves. As a proud bi female member of our GLBT community, it is my definite opinion that we don't need anyone baby-sitting us or looking over our shoulders.

CORI PIERCE  
Portland

NO, NO, NO. Trying to legislate good, healthy behavior will never be successful. The most it will do is drive that type of sexual activity to locations that are not accessible to safe-sex educational messages and places that do not have condoms available. Such regulation by the county would be counterproductive. Maybe the county should provide free testing for all STDs and vaccinations where such vaccines exist. This might help toward solving the problem instead of driving it further underground.

DICK MORAN  
Portland

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A thorny question, but if pressed, I'd have to say no to regulation. I was living in Los Angeles and San Francisco when each city closed its sex clubs. Remember, these regulations are created and administered by straight people who usually have their own agenda. The hetero community's lack of involvement in the early '80s at the beginning of the AIDS crisis continues to rankle. Just because they find us "entertaining" these days doesn't mean they really care about our health; they just want to find another way to control our behavior.

And to what avail, anyway? I'd wager that most barebacking is done privately; parties abound. What the community needs to do is massive education—and perhaps a little fear wouldn't hurt. We need to counter the current idea that HIV doesn't cause AIDS (we didn't lose a generation of men and cross out half our address books because of a myth!), and we need to change SILENCE=DEATH to BAREBACKING=DEATH. It's interesting that, at a time when gay people are trying to convince society that we're responsible, law-abiding citizens "just like you," so many simply ignore one of their foremost responsibilities.

DONALD FINCH  
Portland

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The only problem I have seen has been the lack of support from Cascade AIDS Project. Club Portland has even donated a entire room for CAP to use for testing, etc., and I have yet to see them use it! Club Portland has free condoms everywhere and posted rules against

barebacking and drugs, but how can anyone expect a club to go around watching everyone have sex?

I don't go to the sex club dump downtown; it's far too much of a dive. The one time I did go, I saw one guy take on four people, and no one used a condom. (None were to be seen available.) The one across town is way too small, and I have yet to see hardly anyone in there. The bookstores are a mess and a big problem, as they pretend sex does not happen, but I have seen it, and there are only condoms for sale there.

STUART WAGNER JR.  
Portland

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I think the sex industry, gay or straight, should for public health reasons be legal and regulated. It is not a matter of "thou shalt not...." People will do what they will in their own worlds; education and ad campaigns are the key here. My mind reels with the details on how one might try to do this, but the commercial realm should be held to standards just like restaurant, liquor and care facilities.

TERI NOBLE  
Aloha

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Government regulation of "unhealthy" public sex venues will only cause "unsafe" behavior to move elsewhere, which will make it much harder to stop. The Bush administration's anti-gay AIDS prevention policies are what need changing.

Federally funded programs that have helped HIV-negative men stay safe are being canceled to fund increased HIV testing. This is calculated to artificially inflate the HIV statistics and to incite a moral panic over gay bareback sex.

Prevention programs are also being required to focus on only HIV-positive individuals. This is a shameful attempt to stigmatize and blame HIV-positive men.

Finally, many men have bareback sex because they believe HIV does not cause AIDS, yet the government refuses to aggressively rebut this increasingly popular idea.

THOMAS KRAEMER  
Corvallis

**next issue**

Just Out columnist Lisa Bradshaw hated the first episode of The L Word. Queer Willamette Week columnist Byron Beck loved it. What did you think? Are you looking forward to the rest of the season? Respond at [www.justout.com](http://www.justout.com). (Don't forget to include your name, city and daytime telephone number.)

Get Tested, and Steam Guys Are Smart Guys—Smart Guys Play Safe."

With more than 5,000 members in less than one year, the staff of Steam Portland truly understand and welcome that we are an important link in promoting a safe-sex message. Our objective is to provide a clean, safe, first-class club environment that removes shame. Sex is a fundamental component of the human condition, and there is no shame in healthy sex.

This crisis will be solved when each individual involved in sexual activity assumes personal responsibility for his own health and responsibility for endangering a sex partner's health. A campaign to promote individual responsibility as a cultural norm is in order. While some may label this as a negative message, I say that such a message attacks the problem, not the person.

I suggest that other communities agree. A casual survey of publications from around the country at the Adult Industry Convention in Las Vegas earlier this month showed a wide range of messages focusing on individual responsibility. It makes sense. The effective solution here is individual action. Let's get the message out.

DAVID ANDERSON  
Steam Portland

**Blaming and shaming**

TO THE EDITOR:

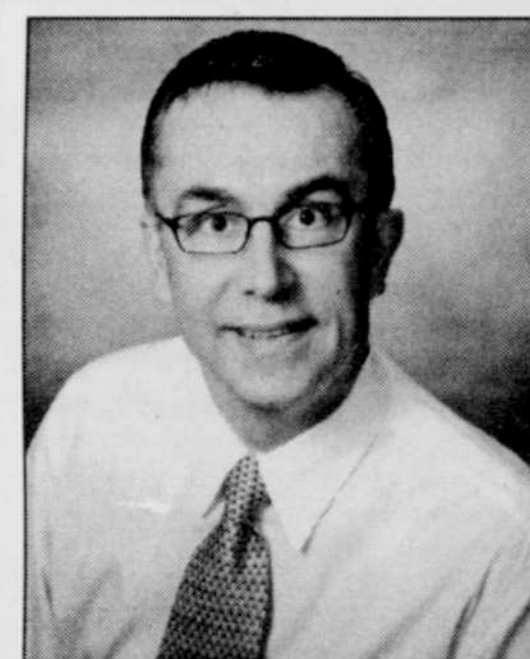
As members of a minority community facing another health crisis, it is incumbent on gay men to approach the challenge of increased transmission of HIV and STDs head on.

Gay men are sexual creatures with a biological urge for physical connection. Emotional connection is also part of our makeup, but often the physical connection is the driving force. This physical connection is often labeled "anonymous sex." How anonymous is a sexual act when two people choose to provide sexual gratification to each other?

The difference between the advent of HIV in the '80s and the current increase in sexually transmitted diseases is knowledge. HIV was a totally unknown condition when it initially emerged. We have learned a tremendous amount about transmission of the infection, and we are aware of how to contain it.

There is no mystery about the current increase in the rate of HIV infection and the

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