



# The Pitt Men's Study

news and notes

fall 2007

## DON'T MESS WITH METH



The health risks of Methamphetamine (a.k.a. Meth, Crystal Meth, or Tina) are well-known to many. Meth can cause depression, stroke, and heart damage. An overdose can be fatal. Health officials warn that even experimenting with meth is dangerous due to its highly addictive properties.

But what you may not realize is that meth can increase one's risk of contracting or spreading HIV. How?

Meth lowers inhibitions and alters judgment. The drug poses particular risks because it is often used to initiate or enhance sexual encounters, especially among men who have sex with men (MSM).

1) Recent studies have shown that MSM who use meth are:

- Less likely to use condoms, or to use them properly.
- More likely to engage in unprotected receptive anal sex.
- More likely to have multiple sex partners.
- More likely to have anonymous sex partners.

• More likely to be infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, including syphilis and hepatitis.

2) Meth deadens pain receptors, so users are more likely to engage in "rough" sex. This increases HIV transmission risk due to abrasions and bleeding from cuts and tears in tissues.

3) Inserting meth into the anus can damage the lining of the rectum, making it more likely to tear during anal sex, and increasing the risk of HIV infection.

4) Injecting meth increases the risk of HIV, as well as of hepatitis B and C.

5) Meth often causes impaired sexual functioning in men, including temporary erectile dysfunction or delayed ejaculation.

• Because of these effects, MSM meth users are more likely to engage in receptive anal sex.

• They are also more likely to use Viagra or similar drugs. Recreational Viagra use increases HIV risk factors, including greater numbers of sex partners and a higher incidence of unprotected sex.

6) Meth poses additional dangers for people who already have HIV infection. People who use the drug may be likely to forget to take their HIV medications. Evidence suggests that meth also has the potential to:

- Suppress immune system responses to HIV or other infections.
- Cause dangerous interactions with HIV medications.
- Increase HIV viral activity.
- Accelerate HIV-related dementia and other health problems.

If you are struggling with methamphetamine addiction, help is available. Call Persad at (412) 441-9786.

More information is available here:  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/public/dohmhnews3-03.pdf>

THE PITT MEN'S STUDY  
P.O. Box 7319, Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
(412) 624-2008 (800) 987-1963  
[www.stophiv.com/pms](http://www.stophiv.com/pms)

Charles R. Rinaldo, PhD, *Principal Investigator*  
Anthony J. Silvestre, PhD, *Publisher*  
Nathaniel J. Soltesz, BS, *Editor*  
William G. Buchanan, MM, *Contributing Editor*  
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Marcy Holloway, MPAS, PA-C, *Contributing Editor*  
Ashley G. Woodson, *Production Assistant*

NEWS AND NOTES is published by the Pitt Men's Study. All information and opinions are the sole responsibility of the the Study and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the University of Pittsburgh or the National Institutes of Health.

# colorectal cancer

## COLORECTAL CANCER: THE FACTS

By *Bill Buchanan*

Some sobering facts about colorectal cancer:

- Every three and a half minutes someone is diagnosed with colorectal cancer in the United States.
- Every ten minutes someone dies of it.
- Nine out of ten cases are found in people older than 50 years of age. Almost half (46%) of our active cohort is at least 50 years old.
- Your risk of getting it increases if a close family member was diagnosed with it before the age of 60 (one in seven of you is at least 60 years old, by the way, not that we're counting).
- African Americans have the highest rate of colorectal cancer in the country. Jews of Eastern European descent have the highest incidence of it in the world.
- A history of polyps in the colon or rectum increases your risk as does a history of bowel disease (such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease).

The recent recurrence of cancer in presidential spokesman Tony Snow (who is now only 51 years old and had his colorectal cancer diagnosed before age 50) demonstrates how big of a problem this is. If a rich white guy with access to the best health care in the world can get it, what chance do the rest of us have?

Actually, we have a good chance, but only if we take steps to prevent it and detect it early. As a colorectal surgeon once told me when I asked him why he chose that specialty, "Because colorectal cancer can be so easy to treat if you catch it early. There are people I operated on over 20 years ago who are still alive and healthy."

Prevention is the first step. Some steps to avoid colorectal cancer include:

- Reducing your intake of fat, especially fat from animal sources. The American Cancer Society recommends that one eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods and to limit intake of high-fat foods.
- Exercising (people who are not active are more likely to develop colorectal cancer). The American Cancer Society recommends at least 30 minutes of physical activity on 5 or more days of the week. Forty-five to 60 minutes of exercise on 5 or more days of the week is even better.
- Keeping your weight down (being overweight increases one's risk of dying from colorectal cancer).

- Not smoking (smokers are 30-40% more likely to die of colorectal cancer, and smoking increases one's risk of many other types of cancer).
- Reducing your use of alcohol (heavy use of alcohol has been linked to colorectal cancer).
- Preventing or controlling diabetes (those with diabetes have a 30% greater chance of developing colorectal cancer and are more likely to die of it).
- Taking advantage of regular screenings for colorectal cancers, especially if 50 years of age or older, if there is a family history of disease and if you are African American.

The Pitt Men's Study encourages their participants to determine their risk for developing colorectal cancer and take the appropriate steps to reduce it.

This includes regular screenings, such as an occult blood test. When performing a digital rectal exam (a very important exam that looks for prostate cancer) the clinician can check to see if there is blood in your stool. Such bleeding can be associated with colorectal cancer. If a clinician tells you that you have blood in your stool, you should see your doctor for follow-up screening which may involve a colonoscopy (a scope that examines the whole length of your large colon). Your doctor may recommend other regular screenings depending on your risk for colorectal cancer.

If you experience any of the following symptoms, you should consult a health care professional as soon as possible:

- A change in bowel habits such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stools that lasts for more than a few days.
- A feeling that you need to have a bowel movement that doesn't go away after doing so.
- Bleeding from the rectum or blood in the stool (often the stool will look normal, however, very dark, tarry stools or what looks like coffee grounds in one's stool are a sign of bleeding high up in the colon).
- Cramping or a steady stomach pain.
- Weakness or tiredness.

Colorectal cancer can be prevented, and if one gets it, it can be cured or controlled if caught early enough. For further information on this and other cancers, please go to [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).

## WHAT TO DO WITH OLD MEDICATIONS



Have you had a change in your prescription medications recently? Do you have left-over pills that you should get rid of? Most people dispose of excess medications by flushing them down the toilet or by throwing them in the trash. However, each of those options pose potential threats to other people, wildlife and/or the environment.

Given the high number of discontinued or changed prescriptions, the American Pharmacists Association has announced suggestions for safely disposing of medications. These suggestions are applicable for all medications, including antiretrovirals:

- **Do not flush unused medications.** The U.S. Wildlife administration has identified situations in which “flushed” drugs have threatened the safety of the fish and wildlife by contaminating the water.
- **Protect children and animals.** Children often confuse pills or capsules with candy. Do not put pills into the trash where they can be accessible by young people or animals. If children or animals ingest medications, they may need to seek emergency care.
- **Protect your personal information.** Be sure to remove and destroy all labels that have your name, address and name of the medication from the bottles before throwing them away. This is particularly important for controlled substances such as narcotics or other medications that have abuse potential. If this information were to get into the wrong hands, someone could request a refill of your medication without your knowledge.

The best way to dispose of medications is to crush solid medications or dissolve them in water and mix with material that would not be ingested such as coffee grounds, sawdust or kitty litter. Place the mixture in a sealed bag or container before putting in the trash. Liquid medications can be disposed of in the same manner. In some areas, there may be approved state collection programs. Your pharmacist will be able to tell you if there is one in your area.

Additional tips regarding your medications include:

- Check the expiration date of all medications, including those purchased without a prescription,
- Keep all medications in their original containers so they are not confused with other drugs,

- Never take prescription drugs that were not prescribed for you, and never give medications prescribed for you to someone else,
- Medications that have changed colors, smell or are sticking together should not be ingested, and finally,
- Take advantage of the offer to review your medications with the pharmacist so that you are well informed about what the medication is used for, what potential side effects it has and whether it can interfere with other medications you take or things you eat.

Save the Dates:

### World AIDS Day 2007



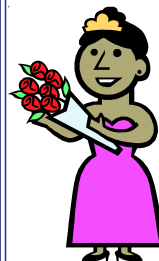
Thursday,  
November 29

7:30 PM

Pittsburgh will commemorate this event with the 20th annual World AIDS Day service sponsored by the Pitt Men’s Study. The theme for this year’s service is “AIDS: Past, Present, and Future.”

The non-denominational, multi-religious service will take place at **Heinz Chapel** (located on Bellefield Ave next to the Cathedral) on the University of Pittsburgh campus in Oakland.

For more information, contact  
[WorldAIDSdayPgh@stophiv.pitt.edu](mailto:WorldAIDSdayPgh@stophiv.pitt.edu)



### 15th Anniversary Miss Tri-State All- Star Pageant ‘08

Holiday Inn - North Hills

4859 McKnight Road; Pittsburgh, PA  
(Near Ross Park Mall)


Sunday, October 14, 2007

7:30 PM - Cash Bar

Contestant’s Application is now on-line:  
[www.kierradarshell.com](http://www.kierradarshell.com)

Tickets:

\$25.00 Advance \$30.00 Door

**Pitt Men's Study**  
**Health**   
**ALERT!**  
**PittMensStudyHealthAlerts@stophiv.pitt.edu**

### **Pitt Men's Study Announces Health Alerts for Gay and Bisexual Men**

Gay and bisexual men in the Pittsburgh region continue to face dangerous and widespread health issues, many of which are ignored by the local media.

A syphilis epidemic among men who find sexual partners in chat rooms, a growing meth epidemic, and a critical lack of hepatitis B vaccinations among our men are all matters of serious concern.

One of the reasons why these problems occur and flourish is because of this lack of media attention.

As a response, the Pitt Men's Study will begin providing free Health Alerts to the community via an email listserv.

“Our clinical staff and our Community Advisory Board have become increasingly concerned about the fact that there are too few information outlets for gay men who are concerned about their health,” said Dr. Charles Rinaldo, principle investigator for the Pitt Men's Study. “We hope that this new program will be a first step in increasing those outlets.”

Those who sign up for the Health Alerts will receive, every two or three months, a brief email written by experts in the field and containing links to trusted sites with additional information. Topics may include syphilis, anal cancer, hepatitis B, eating disorders, tobacco addiction, and the growing methamphetamine epidemic – anything that is of vital importance to the health of gay and bisexual men.

Individuals interested in subscribing to the service can do so by sending an email to **PittMensStudyHealthAlerts@stophiv.pitt.edu** with the word “subscribe” in the subject line (without the quotation marks). You will then receive a confirmation message to verify your email address. After you respond to the verification, you will be added to the list automatically. Health Alert messages will begin in late October of this year.

Members can unsubscribe at any time, and email addresses will be kept private and confidential – they will NOT be sold to another organization or business.