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Safe SeXXX combats 'love bugs'

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Have *you* been tested?



Alonso del Arte/The South End

Julie Howard, a health educator for the city of Detroit, demonstrates a female condom at the Safe SeXXX fair in the Student Center yesterday.

By Tara D. Sullivan
News Editor

In the basement of the Student Center Building, students gathered around an unfamiliar table topped with bowls of treats of an unusual kind: flavored, colorful condoms.

But that's not all that was given out by the handful. There were also flavored dental dams (used to create a barrier for vaginal or anal oral sex), female condoms, informational pamphlets, key chains and lanyards — all to promote "Safe SeXXX," on behalf of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender student organization, and the Detroit Health Department.

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Geronimo Larson, student, holds complimentary condoms.

The Safe SeXXX Fair began at around 11 a.m. and lasted until just after 2 p.m., with members posted at an information booth near the main entrance to the SCB, the sign next to which proclaiming "Abstinence is not the answer."

Others walked around the SCB, handing out free condoms by foot.



Geronimo Alrson, a 26-year-old freshman and music technology major, said that he had put signs announcing the event "everywhere."

"A lot of people tore down our fliers," he said, adding that he ran off about 30 more copies that morning for a re-post. As nervous students inched up to the table to take their pick from the "goodies," Julia Howard, a health educator from the health department, invited them into another room for free HIV and syphilis testing.

One student awkwardly replied that he was pretty sure he was fine, saying, "That was a long time ago," while backing away.

Howard just chuckled at this, saying she's "seen a lot of nervousness" that day, and "It's nothing to be uncomfortable about."

According to the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention, most primary and secondary syphilis cases occur in people between 20 to 39 years of age, and between 2001 and 2002, the number of reported P & S syphilis cases increased

12.4 percent.

The NCD also reported that the rate of infection of STDs is on the rise, especially in gay or bisexual men.

For many, the only way to know for sure is to get tested.

But with as many students that made excuses and turned away at the thought of being seen by their fellow classmates as someone who “needs” to be tested, many more stepped up to the plate.

Tyler Hampton, a 21-year-old sociology and urban studies double major, and member of WSU’s GLBT, said that they saw a “surprising” number of people taking both the HIV and syphilis tests.

The two tests were administered a bit differently, the syphilis test involving drawing blood and filling a small vile, and the HIV test given by way of “orasure,” given by rubbing a cotton swap throughout the inner cheek.

The DHD workers at the event said that the syphilis test results would be available in seven days, while the HIV results could take up to 10 days.

Those taking the tests were assured strict confidentiality, afforded to them by an “anonymous area” and the DHD standard practice of using no names.

Carol Thomas, one of the HIV test administrators from the DHD, assured that all paperwork and test results were only identified by a number assigned to each test taker, rather than their names.

Student test takers were given an ID card with their number on it, and the number of the DHD that they could call for over-the-phone results.

HIV and syphilis are among the more common sexually transmitted diseases, or “love bugs,” but Anthony Cain, a disease intervention specialist from the DHD, pointed out the importance of getting tested for them all.

The DHD offers free STD testing and counseling every weekday at the Herman Kiefer Health Complex located at 1151 Taylor in Detroit.

Cain said he has heard that chlamydia is one of the biggest problems on college campuses.

“We’ve seen more people, more unemployed students [getting tested at the DHD],” he said.

For the convenience of those tested at the SCB, the DHD will return to the same place to give results at noon on March 23.

Hampton said there’ll probably be more free condoms available with the return.

In the future, GLBT plans to hold the event twice yearly.

Both Hampton and Alrson said that they were happy with the turnout, and felt that the event was beneficial to all those involved.

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