

Christmas Survival Guide

2016

Lots of services will be closed over the Christmas period, including Sydney Sexual Health Centre. Albion and is open more than most, but we still aren't here on the public holidays. With that in mind, and given that the period can be one of high emotion (both good and bad), we thought we'd provide a "survival guide" to help you get through some of the challenges that can arise.

Christmas and New Year can hold a lot of expectations. For some it is about shopping, for partying, for eating and being with friends. Some spend time with family, whilst others spend time engaging with their chosen religion.

For many, especially those living with, or impacted by HIV, it can be a stressful time where we are reminded of our difference, our losses, and the ways in which we don't "fit the mould".

The following few pages will give some advice on how to cope in Sydney over the festive period, with advice on how to manage your HIV or PrEP, how to cope emotionally, and some free things to do.

THE **ALBION** CENTRE
PARTNERSHIPS IN HEALTH

SSHHC | SYDNEY
SEXUAL
HEALTH
CENTRE

Sydney Sexual Health Centre

Christmas/New Year Hours
Friday December 23rd
We close at 3pm
and open again at 9:30am
on the Tuesday 3rd 2017

The Albion Centre Clinic and Pharmacy Hours

Monday Dec 26th 2016
CLOSED

Tuesday Dec 27th 2016
CLOSED

Wednesday Dec 28th 2016
9.00am—3.00pm
(Emergency Walk ins only)

Thursday Dec 29th 2016
9.00am—3.00pm
(Emergency Walk ins only)

Friday Dec 30th 2016
CLOSED

Monday Jan 2nd 2017
CLOSED

Tues Jan 3rd 2017
1.00pm 5.45pm

Wednesday Jan 4th 2017
Normal hours resume

Try not to get “wrapped up”

The image of Christmas and New Year presented in the media often highlights how “magical” and “special” is this time of year. Seeing images on friend’s social media pages promoting how much of a fabulous time they are having, the fantastic food they are eating, the amazing parties they are attending, can reinforce the expectations.

For many people though, Christmas can trigger painful memories, or highlight isolation and abandonment. Likewise, expectations about New Years Eve can lead to feeling like we’re not having as much fun as we should, or as other people seem to.

It’s ok not to take part. This doesn’t make you a bad person. Everyone has different approaches to the period and it’s ok to treat it like any other day.

Do Something...

Having said that, it can also be a time to create your own traditions. Perhaps these are things that you can do with some friends, like a special outing to the beach or a park, a nice meal, or just a phone call. It can also be things that you do on your own. Maybe think of it as a time to nurture and care for yourself. Treat yourself to something small but significant. Watch a movie that you like. Experience the strangeness of empty city streets by going for a walk.

It can be a time to consider giving to others by volunteering. The City of Sydney has volunteer days providing meals to those in need. You can find out about it here:

<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/community/participation/volunteer-with-us>

Some volunteering is so popular that you need to get in early, like at the Wayside Chapel (<http://www.thewaysidechapel.com/volunteering.php>) and The Salvos (<https://salvos.org.au/get-involved/>).

You can always search “Go Volunteer” for other opportunities (try using the keyword “Christmas”)

<http://govolunteer.com.au/> .

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Dealing With Family

Christmas can be a particularly stressful time as many of us interact with our family. Did you know that Christmas has the highest murder rate of any time in the year? Chill out before it gets that far! Be aware of the things or times that may upset you. It can be useful to avoid or limit those times. Take some time out for yourself, and have back-up plans in case things don't go well. This might involve an "escape plan", another event (real or imagined) that you need to get to, or a friend who you can call if things get intense. Try to plan this before the day.

Managing Your Meds

Many pharmacies are closed over the Christmas period. Make sure that you have enough of your PrEP or HIV meds to last you through to January. If you are travelling to friends or family, make sure that you have some packed to go with you, perhaps in an unmarked pill box.

New Years can be particularly disruptive; staying up late, and sleeping in. Think about how you're going to take your medications, so that you miss as few doses as possible (hopefully none).

Managing Your Mood

As we have said, sometimes the Christmas break can bring up strong and difficult emotions. Being aware of how to manage your mood is a skill that can be developed. Here's some tips:

1. Meditation and mindfulness skills are here: <http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/docs/ACF3C77.pdf>
2. Noticing body sensations and naming emotions as you feel them can help you have more awareness about what you are experiencing and allow you to choose how to respond
3. Being aware of not getting caught up in the negative – activity can provide positive distraction and rewarding energy - e.g. go for a walk



Drugs and Alcohol

For many, Christmas and New Year can be a time of indulgence, sometimes even over-indulgence. It can be particularly difficult if you are reducing, or quitting a substance. Having others around you who are using or drinking can trigger cravings and urges, as can negative feelings, or boredom. It's worth thinking about what might be trigger points for you, and what you can do to cope. Have a plan about what you will do if you are having an urge. Speak to your psychologist or counsellor, if you have one, about the plan. Some groups run over the Christmas and New Year period and can provide invaluable support. Try looking at the SMART Recovery Website (<http://smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au/>) or the various twelve step programs (<http://www.aa.org.au/>; <http://www.crystalmeth.org.au/>; <http://na.org.au/>).

If you are attending parties and intending on drinking or using drugs, remember to keep yourself safe. Always be aware of your drink, to avoid spiking, and make sure you have a plan with friends about checking in with them before leaving a venue. If you're using IV, make sure you have enough clean equipment, particularly if you may have unexpected visitors, as many NSPs are closed. Remind yourself of your rights whilst partying with this helpful resource from the Inner City Legal Centre (<http://www.iclc.org.au/party-rights/>).

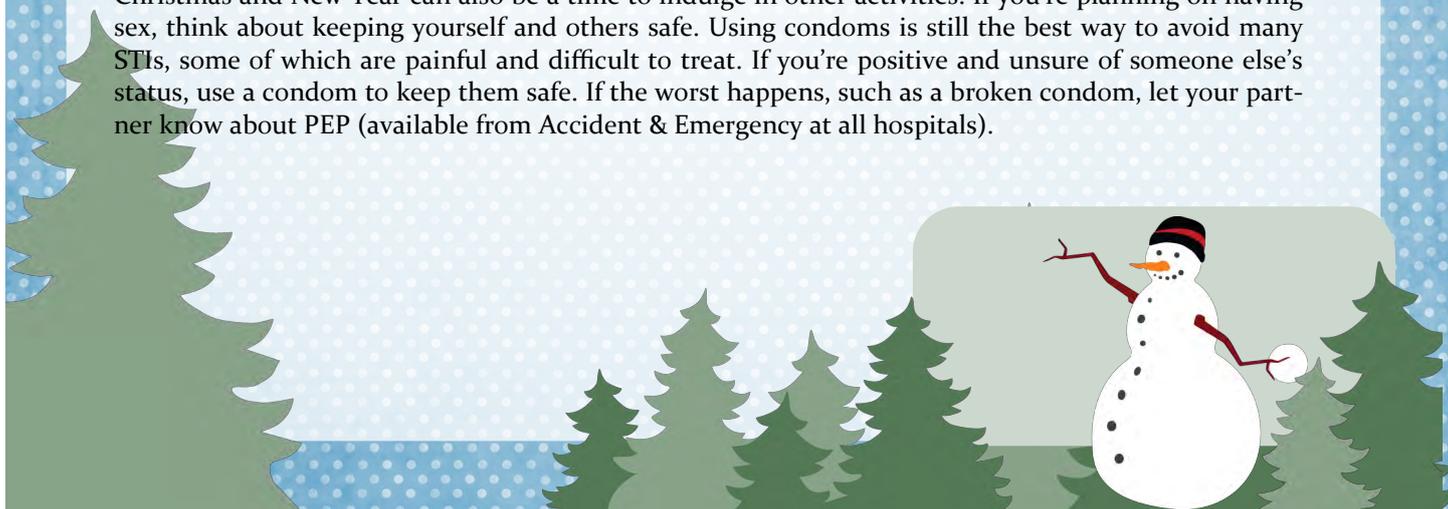
Food, glorious food

Whilst it's ok to enjoy the occasional treat, the many parties and holiday feasts of summer can give people a few too many chances to gorge on the richest foods and drinks. Keep your health and waistline in check by keeping your day to day eating habits balanced, and enjoy your parties without going overboard by having a plan. Survey the spread and pick a few of your favourites to really savour, making sure to stick to your limit, and fill the rest of your plate with fresh salads, BBQed veggies, lean meats and some delicious summer fruits.

The higher temperatures of summer can also bring more food-borne illnesses as the bugs that cause it grow quicker in warmer temperatures, and people tend to let standards slip when they're busy entertaining or being entertained. Make sure you wash your hands before preparing or eating food, and between touching raw and cooked food. Don't let food sit out for longer than two hours; either get it in the fridge or bin it. If you're keeping it as leftovers, use it within 24 hours and only reheat leftovers once.

Sex

Christmas and New Year can also be a time to indulge in other activities. If you're planning on having sex, think about keeping yourself and others safe. Using condoms is still the best way to avoid many STIs, some of which are painful and difficult to treat. If you're positive and unsure of someone else's status, use a condom to keep them safe. If the worst happens, such as a broken condom, let your partner know about PEP (available from Accident & Emergency at all hospitals).



Free Christmas-y things to do in Sydney

Gay and Lesbian Community Christmas Eve Service

24 December 2013 8:00 PM (Doors Open 7:30 PM) The annual Gay and Lesbian Christmas Eve service hosted by Metropolitan Community Church

Venue: Sydney Town Hall, 483 George St.

For more information <http://www.mccsydney.org/christmaseve.html>
Carols by the Sydney Gay and Lesbian choir



Fireworks

Harbourside Fireworks light up the night sky in Darling Harbour at 9pm culminating in a New Year's Eve display of epic proportions!

When: every night between 13th-24th December, 9pm

Where: Darling harbour

Sydney City

A Sydney Christmas is like no other in the world, with its sun-drenched summer days and balmy nights, uniquely Aussie festivities and tradition with a twist.

This Christmas, the City of Sydney is presenting a jam-packed program of FREE events for all the family to enjoy. For further details visit the website <http://www.weekendnotes.com/free-sydney-christmas-events/>

On the day

Exodus Foundation
180 Liverpool St, Ashfield
8752 4600
Christmas Day Service 10am;
Christmas Lunch: from 11:45am
25th December

The Station
82 Erskine Street, Cnr Clarence & Erskine Sts Sydney
9299 2252
Lunch 12-3pm 27th November Dinner, haircuts, live music and goodie bags.
Boxing Day lunch 12:30; 26th December

Matthew Talbot Hostel (St. Vincent de Paul)
Talbot Place, Woolloomooloo
9357 1533
Men 21 years and over only
Breakfast: 7.15 am,
Lunch: 12.30 pm 25th December;

St Michaels Anglican Church
200 Albion St, Surry Hills
0417 405 866
Breakfast



The Sydney Gay & Lesbian History Walk

<http://historywalk.tripod.com/index.html> This website has a series of Real Audio downloads of recordings taking you on a historical tour of gay & Lesbian Sydney. Using landmarks in the CBD & inner city, weave your way through the streets of Sydney, hearing tales of our gay and lesbian forebears.

The Museum of Contemporary Art

It's at Circular Quay Sydney and has a range of exhibitions which are free and always changing. Check out their website for current exhibitions. <http://www.mca.com.au/>

Parramatta reserve walks

The entrance to the reserve is from Lackey Street, off Bourke Street in North Parramatta. There are a number of formal tracks which form a circuit around the edge of the lake which was originally the water supply for Parramatta.

http://www.parracity.nsw.gov.au/play/sports_and_recreation/walking_tracks

Bush Walking

Awesome website with information about bushwalks in and around Sydney.

<http://www.wildwalks.com/>

Many events in Sydney. There's just too much to list! There's a whole range of fun, interesting, strange, exciting stuff posted here: <http://whatson.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/> from art exhibitions, markets, events, talks, community events & much more! Search "free" when you're on the site!

You can also check out the website <http://australia.meetup.com/> which has loads of interesting events and social activities that you can go along to.

The Institute of Many (TIM) is a peer-run group for HIV positive people and their allies. Acting as a social umbrella, it brings people together to share their experience of living with HIV in an informal, confidential environment. Join their mailing list to see what is happening

<http://www.theinstituteofmany.org/>

Pete's Website is dedicated to supporting guy living with HIV who are also experiencing anxiety and depression <http://pete.org.au/about>



Other Resources

RESOURCES, NUMBERS AND WEBSITES

QLife – 1800 184 527 or www.qlife.org.au for online chat
Telephone Counselling and Information Line operates 7 days from 5.30pm - 10.30pm
(Includes Christmas Day!)

Lifeline - 13 11 14
Telephone counselling 24-hour a day, any day of the week from anywhere in Australia.

Family Drug Support Help Line - 1300 368 186 (24 Hrs).
Telephone counselling offering support for people who have family with a drug dependency issue.

ICLC (Inner City Legal Centre) - <http://www.iclc.org.au>
Is a non-profit community based legal centre that provides specialist Gay & Lesbian legal advice, as well as specialist Transgender legal advice.
You can call them on 02) 9332 1966

Link2Home 1800 152 152
This service is for 18+, provides crisis accommodation options

