In Your Wildest Steams

Boys in bathhouse talk HIV

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“A safer bang for your buck” could be the motto at Steamworks Bathhouse in Berkeley, California, where prevention efforts are in full, er, steam. In addition to the standard locker, towel and heat, the 24/7 bathhouse jacks up HIV-prevention messages to nearly 7,000 men a month by offering safer-sex events, HIV testing and counseling, free massage lessons and sex-talk workshops. “We’re giving men other tools to use in their toolbox of erotic toys,” said Paul Cotten, who runs Steamworks’ Health Information Program. Sex ed begins when patrons enter and are asked to sign a card pledging safer sex. And anyone who gets tested for HIV can play for free. “They call to ask when the drop-in counseling is,” Cotten said. The club has won community health awards and copped a rave site review from the CDC. Its mix of counseling and cruising offers a “sexually charged environment where people are challenged to think while they’re already horny,” said Robert Perez of San Francisco’s Stop AIDS Project, adding that many men intending to be safe throw caution to the wind when the going gets hot.

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