



Safer Advocacy

Increasing sexual health awareness is a timely mission for University of Oregon premed student Joshua Jaffe.

March 24, 2025 By Jay Lassiter

Joshua Jaffe wants to make condoms cool again. A 20-year-old premed student at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Jaffe is the president of the Harm Reduction Club at University of Oregon, a student group affiliated with Oregon's HIV Alliance. Together, these organizations aim to eradicate HIV while addressing the needs of those living with it.

"We have an event planned, and it's all about safer sex," Jaffe explains. "It is the University of Oregon Condom Fashion Show showcasing outfits made entirely out of raw, unprocessed condoms. They look amazing! And it's all about safer sex. I think people should be a little concerned about diseases and infections. A lot of these are curable, but a lot of them aren't, which is why I think we should keep our guard up."

Increasing sexual health awareness is a timely mission for Jaffe's more than 22,000 classmates and for the community of Eugene, which has a population of about 177,000. Jaffe notes that advancements in birth control have diminished the role of condoms in the average undergrad's sex life.

"Our message is, 'Hey, we know you may not get pregnant. Wear a condom anyway.' Because I think a lot of people are unaware what condoms can protect them from because modern birth control has gotten really good," Jaffe says. "Many women are on the pill or have IUDs [intrauterine devices]. As a result, many dudes just say they're going to pull out. When it comes to condoms, lots of men aren't quite there yet. The reality is sexually transmitted infections [STIs] are on the rise in universities because virtually no one uses a condom anymore because they're not at risk of having a baby."

Jaffe's attention is not limited to the mostly heterosexual, relatively affluent student body. He's especially mindful of those living on the margins and at increased risk for HIV. He's particularly focused on Eugene residents who inject drugs, many of whom are homeless.

“The biggest accomplishment that we’ve completed is getting other needle exchanges up and running around Eugene,” he says. “We used to only be able to run a needle exchange from our main office location. We weren’t able to take it on the road and park vans across the city. We now have a mobile needle exchange, and I really enjoy that outreach. They come for the needle exchange, but we also offer a series of homeless services. We had a project where about 300 people enrolled last year, and by the end of it, 76 of them had permanent housing.”

And all the while, Jaffe remains committed to the sexual health of his clients and classmates, something he likens to a good investment in dollars and in lives.

“Health services on campus spends a lot of resources managing STIs,” he explains. “I spend a lot of time combating these diseases because if we can just lower those rates by a little bit, the entire university health system will improve.”