# **Study reveals health concern over grooming pubic hair**

By Kemal Atlay

6:00 PM Wednesday Dec 7, 2016

Pubic hair grooming, including shaving, trimming and the full Brazilian, could increase your risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), according to a new study.

Researchers from the University of California, San Francisco conducted a survey on over 14,000 people between 18 and 65 years of age and found that "groomers" had a higher risk of getting an STI than "non-groomers".

The study was published today in the research journal *Sexually Transmitted Infections*.

"In this study, we demonstrate that pubic hair grooming linked to heightened sexually transmitted infection (STI) risk," lead author Dr E. Charles Osterberg told news.com.au.

"In particular, this association is strongest among those who groom their pubic hair frequently and/or remove all of their pubic hair often," he says.

The survey asked respondents about their sexual history and the frequency and intensity (trimming or complete removal) of their pubic hair-grooming regimen - groomers tended to be younger, more sexually active and have more sexual partners.

However, it was found that even when adjusting the responses for age and number of lifetime sexual partners, pubic hair removal of any kind was associated with an 80 per cent increased risk of STIs.

"To date, little is known about the potential link between grooming and STIs," says Osterberg. "Prior case reports have suggested there may be an association."

Around 13 per cent of respondents reported having had at least one of the following infections: Herpes, syphilis, human papillomavirus (HPV), molluscum, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, HIV, or pubic lice.

It was also found that 17 per cent of survey respondents were classified as "extreme" groomers who removed all pubic hair at least 11 times a year, whereas 22 per cent were classified as "high frequency" groomers who trimmed their pubic hair on a daily or weekly basis.

"Among those who reported a STI, frequent and complete removal of one's pubic hair was associated with a 3.5 to 4-fold heightened risk, particularly for infections that arise through skin on skin contact, such as herpes and HPV," says Dr Osterberg.

In contrast, those who reported low intensity and/or frequency of grooming were associated with twice the risk of getting a lice infestation, which is supported by research showing that pubic hair removal makes it harder for crabs to breed.

The most common grooming tool among men was the electric razor (42 per cent), and among women it was the manual razor (61 per cent).

The author says that as a result of changing perceptions of the role of body hair in attractiveness or hygiene, pubic hair removal was becoming more common.

"Perceptions of genital normalcy have changed as modern society's definition of attractiveness and feelings of femininity and masculinity have changed," says Dr Osterberg.

However, because it was an observational study, the researchers stress that no solid conclusions can be drawn about causality - there is only a positive correlation between grooming and risk of infection.

Instead, they suggest that pubic hair removal could simply be a proxy for higher levels of sexual activity, for example having frequent sex could motivate you to better groom more often, which is also linked to higher risk of getting an STI.

"As society's definition of attractiveness and feelings of femininity and masculinity have changed, the perceptions of genital normalcy have changed," says Osterberg.

"Prior data suggests that men and women may groom prior to anticipated sexual activity."

The next step in the research will be to conduct a national study with medically confirmed STI diagnoses that can confirm the findings in this study, as well as looking at whether grooming is resulting in microtears in the skin that might be aiding bacterial or viral infection.

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