# Waxing warning: ‘extreme grooming’ of pubic hair quadruples risk of sexually transmitted disease

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Regularly waxing, trimming or shaving pubic hair quadruples the risk of picking up a sexually transmitted infection, a new study suggests.

Hair removal is becoming increasingly common worldwide for both men and women, with many people believing it is cleaner and more attractive.

But a new [US study](http://sti.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/sextrans-2016-052687) of 7,500 people between 18 and 65 found a link between [grooming](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-health/11087771/Pubic-hair-8-things-you-need-to-know-before-you-shave.html) and sexually transmitted infections.

‘Extreme groomers’, categorised as those who trimmed, shaved or waxed completely at least once a month, were four times more likely to have picked up an infection.

However, any type of grooming was associated with an 80 per cent heightened risk of having a sexually transmitted infection compared with no grooming.

The researchers suggest that grooming may indicate higher levels of sexual activity and associated infection risk, or that it might cause tiny skin tears, through which bacteria and viruses can easily pass.

They advise doctors to advise patients about safer sexual practices if they spot evidence of grooming in the surgery.

Dr Benjamin Breyer, of San Francisco General Hospital, said: “We found that a greater proportion of groomers reported a history of STIs than non-groomers.

“Grooming may cause epidermal micro-tears, which may increase the risk of STIs. As a second possible explanation for our findings, shared use of grooming tools may lead to STI transmission.

“As a third possible explanation for our findings, individuals who groom may be more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours than those who do not groom. Although we adjusted our analyses for lifetime sexual partners, it is still possible that our findings may have been confounded by risky sexual behaviours.”

Almost three out of four (74 per cent) respondents said they had groomed their pubic hair before, with more women (84 per cent) than men (66 per cent), saying they had done so.

Among the groomers, 17 per cent were classified as ‘extreme’ and 22 per cent as ‘high frequency’ - meaning daily or weekly, with one in 10 falling into both categories.

Overall, groomers tended to be younger, more sexually active, and to have had more annual and total lifetime sexual partners.

In all, 13 per cent of people said they had had at least one of the following: herpes; human papilloma virus (HPV); syphilis; molluscum; gonorrhoea; chlamydia; HIV; or pubic lice.

By contrast, low intensity/frequency grooming was associated with a doubling in risk of a lice infestation, suggesting that grooming might make it harder for lice to breed successfully.

The research was published in the journal [Sexually Transmitted Infections.](http://sti.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/sextrans-2016-052687)