# **Pubic hair grooming linked to sexually transmitted infections**

[**Mona Chalabi**](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/mona-chalabi) **and** [**Jan Diehm**](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/jan-diehm)

Tuesday 13 December 2016 16.03 GMTLast modified on Tuesday 13 December 2016 16.11 GMT

Study finds that adults who wax, shave or pluck are twice as likely to get an infection because of cuts – but there are other possible explanations for the link

Adults who groom their pubic hair have higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) according to a [study](http://sti.bmj.com/content/early/2016/10/31/sextrans-2016-052687.full.pdf+html) released this month. People who shaved, waxed, trimmed or plucked their pubic hair were found to be twice as likely to have cutaneous STIs such as herpes which can spread via the skin. They were also 90% more likely to have lice and 70% more likely to have secretory STIs like chlamydia which can spread via bodily fluids.

In all, 7,580 US adults were contacted as part of the survey. They were asked whether they groom their hair (66% of men and 84% of women said they did) and if so, how. Respondents were classified as “high-frequency groomers” if they trimmed their pubic hair daily or weekly.

Those who had removed all of their pubic hair more than 11 times per year were labeled as “extreme groomers”.

The best defense against STIs is to practice safe sex, not to stop pubic grooming.

The study didn’t prove a clear cause and effect between pubic hair grooming and STIs, only that the two are connected. Nevertheless, causation is “plausible” according to authors E Charles Osterberg and his colleagues, “because the act of grooming with razors or shavers causes epidermal microtears, which may permit epithelial penetrance by bacterial or viral STIs”.

(Translation: if you’re grooming your pubic hair, you might end up cutting yourself which could make you more vulnerable to getting an STI.)

But there are other possible explanations. Some people might have chosen to remove their pubic hair after discovering that they have an STI. It’s also possible that people who groom their pubic hair have different sex lives from those who don’t – either having more frequent sex or engaging in more risky sexual behaviors. Weekly sexual activity was more common among those who groomed their pubic hair than those who didn’t.

[Most](http://www.nhs.uk/news/2016/07July/Pages/Many-women-think-shaving-pubic-hair-is-hygienic.aspx) women who groom their pubic hair do so because they think it’s more hygienic, according to a separate study published in July this year. That is incorrect. Shaving away pubic hair can make the vagina more vulnerable to irritation and infection.