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# Safer Sex

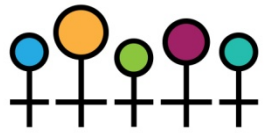
*Last updated: August 27, 2021*

*Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.*

#onewomanatathetime

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

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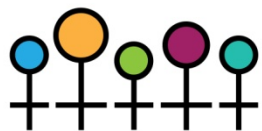
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# What is Safer Sex?

*Safer sex (n.):* Sex that **reduces the chances of spreading or getting** sexually transmitted diseases or infections (STDs or STIs)

- Involves certain actions (e.g., using a condom) that prevent person-to-person ***sharing of bodily fluids*** that are able to spread STIs
- Choosing to have safer sex shows that you care about the ***pleasure and health of you and your sexual partner(s)***



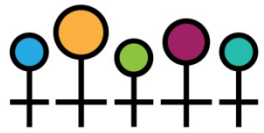


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# Safer Sex: Not Just HIV Prevention

Safer sex can:

- Be fun, exciting, very pleasurable
  - Can decrease your worry about getting or spreading STIs and thus make sex more relaxed and satisfying
  - May add variety to your sex life
  - Chance to build trust, intimacy with your partner by talking about each other's desires
- Prevent infection with other STIs, which can weaken immune system in people living with HIV
- Reduce possibility of acquiring another strain of HIV, if all partners are living with HIV

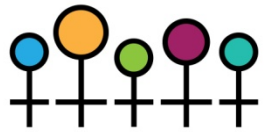


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# Practicing Safer Sex

Practicing safer sex involves knowing:

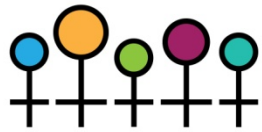
- What sexual activities are risky for each person
- How you can ***make that activity less risky***
- What bodily fluids can spread STIs:
  - Blood (including menstrual blood)
  - Vaginal secretions
  - Semen (cum and pre-cum)
  - Anal fluids



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# Practicing Safer Sex

- Using barriers can help reduce risk of spreading or getting STIs
  - Keeps a partner's fluids from getting into/onto another's body
  - Barriers include:
    - Condoms (male and female)
    - Dental dams (thin squares of latex)
    - Latex or nitrile gloves
- Today, there are more HIV protection options for people who don't want to use barriers, or whose partners won't use barriers

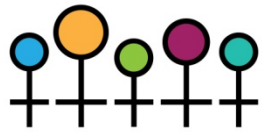


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# Practicing Safer Sex

*Treatment as prevention (TasP): the **use of HIV treatment** to lower risk of HIV transmission*

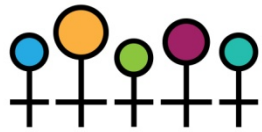
- For people living with HIV:
  - Taking HIV drugs can reduce their viral load
  - An undetectable viral load means they **cannot transmit HIV through sex**
- For people who are HIV-negative:
  - Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP): Taking HIV drugs before being exposed to HIV to prevent yourself from getting it
    - **Women can use it to prevent HIV without their partners' knowledge or cooperation**
  - Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP): Taking HIV drugs for about a month, immediately after possible exposure to HIV (e.g., sex without condoms or other barriers) to prevent HIV acquisition



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# Male Condoms

- Mostly made of latex; some made of polyisoprene (type of plastic) or lambskin
  - Only latex and plastic condoms prevent HIV
  - Lambskin condoms ***DO NOT prevent HIV***; DO prevent pregnancy
- Variety of shapes, sizes, colors, textures, tastes
- Inexpensive at pharmacies, grocery stores, sex stores
  - Free at certain health clinics, AIDS-service organizations
- Small, easy to carry with you
  - You can ***always be prepared to protect yourself!***

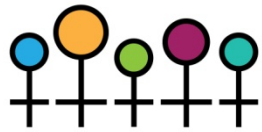


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# Internal (Female) Condoms

- Made of latex or polyurethane
- Can be ***put inside vagina or anus before beginning sexual activity***
- Usually cost a bit more than male condoms
- Often available at pharmacies, grocery stores, sex stores
- Available for free at certain health clinics and AIDS service organizations

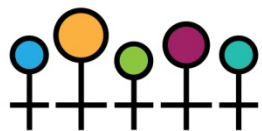




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# Lubricant (Lube)

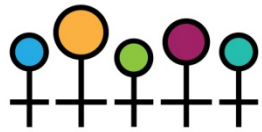
- Makes penetrative sex (vaginal-penile, anal-penile, fisting) ***even safer***
  - Can prevent condom from breaking
  - Helps prevent small cuts or tears in vagina, anus, rectum, and/or on penis during penetration
- Makes condoms ***feel better***
  - Some contain substances that “warm” or enhance sensation
- Good for un-lubricated and already-lubricated condoms
  - Sometimes lubrication on condoms is not enough
- Several types, brands; variety of different feels, tastes



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# Cautions with Condoms and Lube

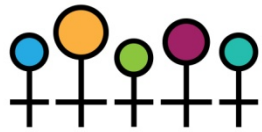
- ***When using latex barriers:***
  - Use only water- or silicone-based lube
    - Silicone-based lube will last longer than water-based lube
  - **No oil-based lubes** (Vaseline, Crisco, shea butter, coconut or baby oil)
    - They can weaken latex condoms, make them more likely to break
- Don't use condoms with spermicide Nonoxynol-9 (N-9)
  - Shorter shelf life
  - No better at pregnancy prevention than other lubricated condoms
  - May cause irritation of vagina/rectum and increase HIV risk



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# Vaginal-Penile Sex

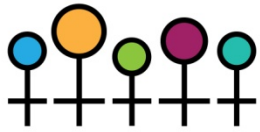
- **Heterosexual intercourse** (penis goes into vagina)
  - High-risk activity when barriers or TasP/PrEP/PEP not used
  - Most common way HIV is spread worldwide
  - Men living with HIV are much more likely to transmit to women than women living with HIV are to transmit to men
- **Effective ways to make vaginal-penile sex safer:**
  - Use a condom
  - Consider using lube
  - Consider PrEP
- If not using a condom, avoid getting semen in vagina by having man pull out before **ejaculating**, however:
  - HIV can be in **pre-cum** (fluid from penis before ejaculation)
  - Man pulling out not a guarantee that you will not get STIs



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# Anal-Penile Sex

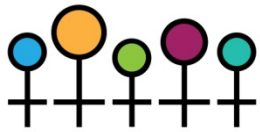
- Penis enters **anus** (butt-hole)
  - High-risk activity when barriers or TasP/PrEP/PEP not used
  - Risk for receptive partner higher than for insertive partner
  - Still risky for insertive partner
- Making anal-penile sex safer:
  - Use a condom (male for insertive partner, or female for receptive partner) and lube
  - Consider PrEP
  - Ongoing research into which type of lube best for anal sex
- If not using a condom, avoid getting semen in anus by having partner pull out before ejaculating



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# Oral Sex

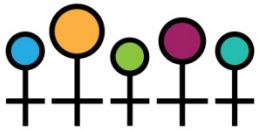
- Contact between mouth and genitals
- Includes giving or receiving licking, sucking, biting of vulva (vagina, clitoris, and labia, or "lips"), penis, or anus
- Number of studies have demonstrated low but definite level of risk associated with both giving and receiving oral-penile sex
- To make oral sex safer:
  - Use an unlubricated latex condom (does not have lube on it)
  - If you perform oral-penile sex without a condom
    - Finish up with your hand, or
    - Spit semen out, rinse with mouthwash, rather than swallowing



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# Oral Sex

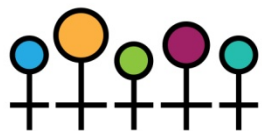
- Rare but documented cases of HIV being spread from female-to-male and female-to-female during oral-vaginal sex
- To make oral sex on a woman safer:
  - Use a **dental dam** (latex square) or a condom that has been cut open
  - Put some water- or silicone-based lube on one side of dental dam or cut-open condom
  - Stretch dam or condom over vulva with lubed side facing away from mouth; makes thin barrier between mouth and vulva
  - Some people use plastic food wrap
    - May prevent transmission of herpes infections
    - **No proof it can prevent transmission of HIV**



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# Oral Sex

- Oral-anal sex has been shown to spread hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, as well as other infections
- To make oral-anal sex on a man or woman safer
  - Use a dental dam or a condom that has been cut open
  - Put water- or silicone-based lube on one side of dental dam/condom
  - Stretch dam or condom over anus with lubed side facing away from mouth; makes thin barrier between mouth and anus
  - Consider PrEP
  - If you do not use a barrier during oral sex, avoid getting pre-cum, semen, menstrual blood, or vaginal fluids in your mouth
    - Avoid oral sex on a woman who is menstruating to prevent contact with blood
    - Bleeding gums, ulcers, or gum disease can make oral sex much riskier
    - Do not floss or brush your teeth just before oral sex; use a breath mint instead

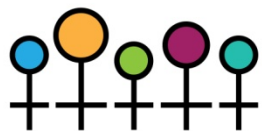


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# Sex with Sex Toys

- STIs can be transmitted by using sex toys (vibrators, etc.)
  - Sex toys need to be kept clean, ***whether used alone or with partners***
  - If not cleaned after each use, can grow bacteria, cause infection
    - Sex toys made of different materials must be cleaned in different ways
    - Read package insert instructions on how to clean your toy properly
- To make sex toy play safer:
  - Use toys with fresh latex condoms whenever toy is used by a different person, or in a different location (moves from vagina to anus or vice-versa)
  - Lube with sex toys enhances pleasure, reduces damage to tissues of vagina, mouth, anus, rectum
  - Do not use silicone-based lube with silicone sex toys; will destroy toy
- Sex toys only used by one person reduce chance of passing STIs

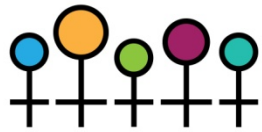




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# Fisting, Handballing, or Fingering

- Paper cuts and other openings in the skin can make your hands vulnerable to infection
- Wearing latex or nitrile gloves keeps you protected during hand-vagina, hand-penis, or hand-anus sex
- Adding water- or silicone-based lube to the outside of the gloves can increase your partner's pleasure

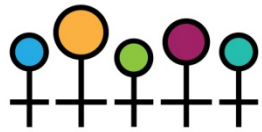


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# No-Risk Safer Sex Activities

These activities do not spread STIs because there is ***no physical contact with another's bodily fluids:***

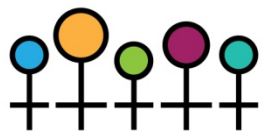
- Masturbation: touching your own genitals
- Phone sex, cybersex
- Talking dirty, sharing sexual fantasies
- Intimacy without sex: hugging, touching, massage



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# Other Safer Sex Tips

- Limit time and frequency of insertive sex
  - Repeated or rough vaginal, anal, and oral sex play can cause damage to linings of these areas
- Try non-insertive sex – **mutual masturbation** (touching each other's genitals)
- Get medical attention for health problems in genital area
- Have a clear head
  - Under influence of drugs or alcohol, more likely to have unsafe sex
- Plan ahead: Get condoms, dental dams, gloves, lube, etc., before sexual situation



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# Think About It in New Ways

*"We slipped once and forgot to use a condom, so it is too late now"*

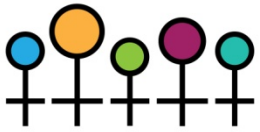
- **New idea: It is never too late**

- Yes, even one time can be dangerous, but it is not as dangerous as many more times!
- If you slipped once, it is time to get back on the wagon
- Post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP, may also be an option

*"Safer sex is such a drag. It is no fun"*

- **New idea: Here is a great chance to spice up your sex life**

- Why not take one of the workshops offered on "Eroticizing Safer Sex?"
- How about getting a book, video, or DVD about hot safer sex?

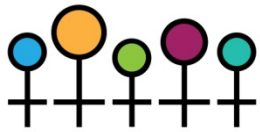


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# Think About It in New Ways

*"Even though I'm taking HIV drugs and my viral load is undetectable, I am still worried that my partner will get HIV from me"*

- **New idea: Undetectable equals Untransmittable!**
  - Feel free to let go of the decades of fear-based messages about HIV risk
  - While HIV drugs do not prevent other STIs or pregnancy, you and your partner(s) can rest easy and enjoy each other knowing that HIV transmission is not an issue



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# Think About It in New Ways

*"I cannot feel anything through condoms!"*

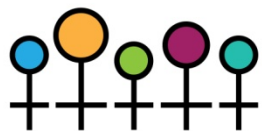
- **New idea: Time to change brands!**

- Free or drug-store condoms may not be the best
- Try sex supply catalogs or “adult love” stores

*"Condoms are the method I want to use, but my partner absolutely refuses to use one."*

- **New idea: How comfortable are you with someone who is willing to put your health at risk?**

- Serious issue; probably not the only one in your relationship
- Consider individual/couples counseling
- Use internal condom or offer to use your mouth to put on male condom



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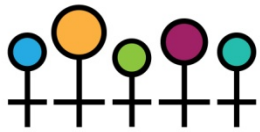
# Think About It in New Ways

*"I'm afraid that my partner will hurt me if I suggest that he use a condom."*

- **New idea: How comfortable are you with someone who may hurt you?**
  - Serious issue; probably not the only one in your relationship
  - **National Domestic Violence hotline in the US at 800-799-SAFE [1-800-799-7233; or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY)].**

*"I cannot suggest to my partner that we get an HIV test. He or she would take it as an insult."*

- **New idea: How about presenting it as an act of love?**
  - I don't want to put you at risk, let's get tested together
  - Taking PrEP also an option if you are HIV-negative



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## Learn More!

- To learn more, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet:
  - [Safer Sex](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
  - [www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)
  - [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](https://www.facebook.com/thewellproject)
  - [www.twitter.com/thewellproject](https://www.twitter.com/thewellproject)