



the**well**project

Safer Sex

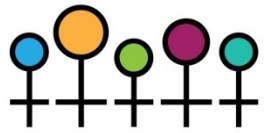
Last updated: March 21, 2024

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

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

#thewellproject



thewellproject

What is Safer Sex?

Safer sex (n.): Sex that reduces the chances of passing on or acquiring 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)**



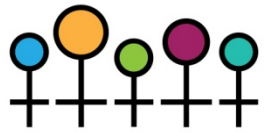


thewellproject

Safer Sex: Not Just HIV Prevention

Safer sex can:

- Be fun, exciting, very pleasurable
 - Can decrease your worry about getting or passing on 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

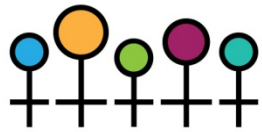


thewellproject

Practicing Safer Sex

Practicing safer sex involves knowing:

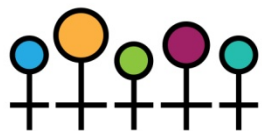
- What sexual activities make each person vulnerable
- How you can ***lower the chance of transmission through that activity***
- Bodily fluids that can transmit STIs:
 - Blood (including menstrual blood)
 - Vaginal secretions
 - Semen (cum and pre-cum)
 - Anal fluids
- Hepatitis C can also be sexually transmitted



thewellproject

Practicing Safer Sex

- Using barriers can help reduce risk of passing on or getting STIs
 - Keeps a partner's fluids from getting into another's body
 - Barriers include:
 - Condoms (male and internal, or 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

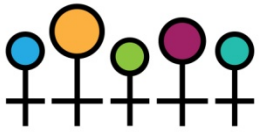


thewellproject

Practicing Safer Sex

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

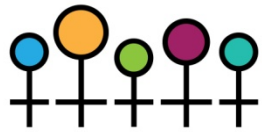
- For people living with HIV:
 - Taking HIV drugs can reduce their viral load
 - An undetectable viral load means they **cannot transmit HIV through sex**
- For people who are HIV-negative:
 - Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP): Taking HIV drugs before being exposed to HIV to prevent yourself from acquiring it
 - **Women can use it to prevent acquiring HIV without their partners' knowledge or cooperation – especially if partner won't use condom**
 - Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP): Taking HIV drugs for about a month, starting within 3 days of possible exposure to prevent HIV acquisition



thewellproject

Male (External) Condoms

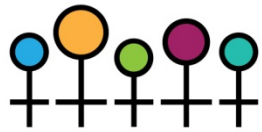
- Mostly made of latex; some made of polyisoprene (type of plastic) or lambskin
 - Only latex and plastic condoms prevent HIV
 - Lambskin condoms ***DO NOT prevent HIV***; DO prevent pregnancy
- Variety of shapes, sizes, colors, textures, tastes
- Inexpensive at pharmacies, grocery stores, sex stores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



thewellproject

Internal (Female) Condoms

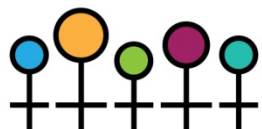
- Made of latex or polyurethane
- Can be ***put inside vagina or anus before beginning sexual activity***
- Usually cost a bit more than male condoms
- Often available at pharmacies, grocery stores, sex stores
- Available for free at certain health clinics and AIDS service organizations



thewellproject

Lubricant (Lube)

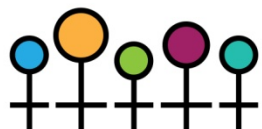
- Makes penetrative sex (vaginal-penile, anal-penile, fisting) ***even safer***
 - Can prevent condom from breaking
 - Helps prevent small cuts or tears in vagina, anus, rectum, and/or on penis during penetration
- Makes condoms ***feel better***
 - Some contain substances that “warm” or enhance sensation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



thewellproject

Cautions with Condoms and Lube

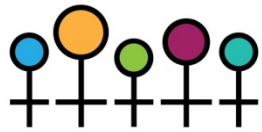
- ***When using latex barriers:***
 - Use only water- or silicone-based lube
 - Silicone-based lube will last longer than water-based lube
 - **No oil-based lubes** (Vaseline, Crisco, shea butter, coconut or baby oil)
 - They can weaken latex condoms, make them more likely to break
- Don't use condoms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



thewellproject

Vaginal-Penile Sex

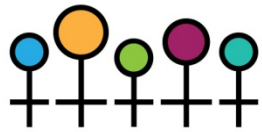
- **Heterosexual intercourse** (penis goes into vagina)
 - High-risk activity when barriers or TasP/PrEP/PEP not used
 - Most common way HIV is transmitted worldwide
 - Transmission much more likely from man to woman than reverse
- **Effective ways to make vaginal-penile sex safer:**
 - Use a condom
 - Consider using lube
 - Consider PrEP
- **If not using a condom, avoid getting semen in vagina by having person with penis pull out before **ejaculating**, however:**
 - HIV can be in **pre-cum** (fluid from penis before ejaculation)
 - Not a guarantee against pregnancy, HIV or other STIs



thewellproject

Anal-Penile Sex

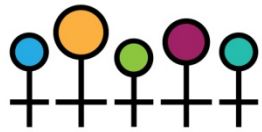
- Penis enters **anus** (butt-hole)
 - High-risk activity when barriers or TasP/PrEP/PEP not used
 - Receptive partner more vulnerable than insertive partner
 - May still be risky for insertive partner
- Making anal-penile sex safer:
 - Use a condom (male for insertive partner, or female for receptive partner) and lube
 - Consider PrEP
- If not using a condom, avoid getting semen in anus by having partner pull out before ejaculating
 - Not a guarantee against HIV or other STIs



thewellproject

Oral Sex

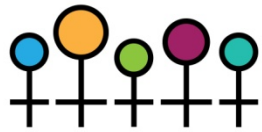
- Contact between mouth and genitals
- Includes giving or receiving licking, sucking, biting of vulva (vagina, clitoris, and labia, or "lips"), penis, or anus
- Number of studies have demonstrated low but definite level of risk associated with both giving and receiving oral-penile sex
- To make oral sex safer:
 - Use a latex condom without 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



thewellproject

Oral-Vaginal Sex

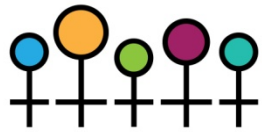
- Rare but documented cases of HIV being transmitted during oral-vaginal sex
- To make oral-vaginal sex safer:
 - Use a **dental dam** (latex square) or a condom that has been cut open
 - Put some water- or silicone-based lube on one side of dental dam or cut-open condom
 - Stretch dam or condom over 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**



thewellproject

Oral-Anal Sex

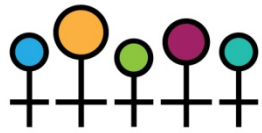
- Oral-anal sex has been shown to spread hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, as well as other infections
- To make oral-anal sex safer:
 - Use a dental dam or a condom that has been cut open
 - Put water- or silicone-based lube on one side of dental dam/condom
 - Stretch dam or condom over anus 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 STI transmission more likely
 - Do not floss or brush your teeth just before oral sex; use a breath mint instead



thewellproject

Sex with Sex Toys

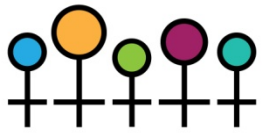
- STIs can be passed on by using sex toys (vibrators, etc.)
 - Sex toys need to be kept clean, ***whether used alone or with partners***
 - If not cleaned after each use, can grow bacteria, cause infection
 - Sex toys made of different materials must be cleaned in different ways
 - Read package insert 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



the**well**project

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

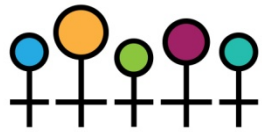


thewellproject

No-Risk Safer Sex Activities

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

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



thewellproject

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 sex that leaves you vulnerable to acquiring HIV
- Plan ahead: Get condoms, dental dams, gloves, lube, etc., before sexual situation



thewellproject

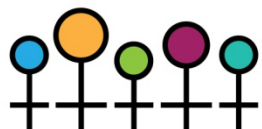
Think About It in New Ways

"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 or watching a video about hot safer sex?

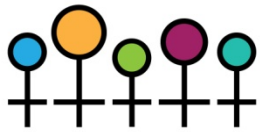


thewellproject

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



thewellproject

Think About It in New Ways

"I cannot feel anything through condoms!"

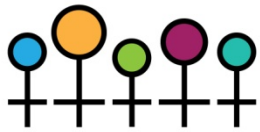
- **New idea: Time to change brands!**

- 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 not willing to listen to your needs regarding your health?**

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



thewellproject

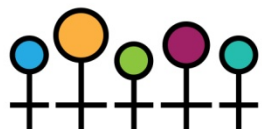
Think About It in New Ways

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

- **New idea: How comfortable are you being 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)], or text START to 88788.**

"I cannot suggest to my partner that we get an HIV test. They 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



the**well**project

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
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.twitter.com/thewellproject
 - www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv
 - www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv