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Safer Sex

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

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

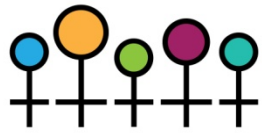
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What is Safer Sex?

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)***





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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 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 acquisition of 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

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

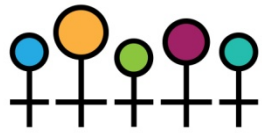
Practicing Safer Sex

- 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 (external or “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

Practicing Safer Sex

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

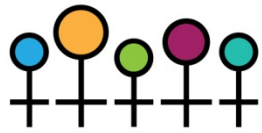
- For people living with HIV:
 - Taking HIV drugs can reduce their viral load
 - An undetectable viral load means they **cannot transmit HIV through sex**
- For people who are HIV-negative:
 - Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP): Taking HIV drugs before being exposed to HIV to prevent yourself from acquiring 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



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External (Male) Condoms

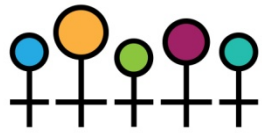
- Mostly made of latex; some made of polyisoprene (type of plastic) or lambskin
 - Only latex and plastic condoms prevent HIV
 - Lambskin condoms ***DO NOT prevent HIV***; DO prevent pregnancy
- Variety of shapes, sizes, colors, textures, tastes
- Inexpensive at pharmacies, grocery stores, sex stores
 - 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

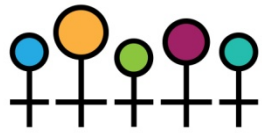
- Made of latex or polyurethane
- Can be ***put inside vagina or anus before beginning sexual activity***
- Usually cost a bit more than male condoms
- Often available at pharmacies, grocery stores, sex stores
- Available for free at certain health clinics and AIDS service organizations



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Lubricant (Lube)

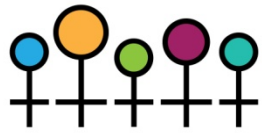
- Makes penetrative sex (vaginal-penile, anal-penile, fisting) ***even safer***
 - Can prevent condom from breaking
 - Helps prevent small cuts or tears in vagina, anus, rectum, and/or on penis during penetration
- Makes condoms ***feel better***
 - Some contain substances that “warm” or enhance sensation
- 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

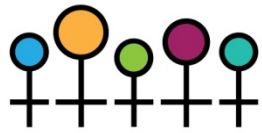
- ***When using latex barriers:***
 - Use only water- or silicone-based lube
 - Silicone-based lube will last longer than water-based lube
 - **No oil-based lubes** (Vaseline, Crisco, shea butter, coconut or baby oil)
 - They can weaken latex condoms, make them more likely to break
- Don't use condoms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



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Vaginal-Penile Sex

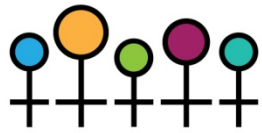
- **Heterosexual intercourse** (penis goes into vagina)
 - High-risk activity when barriers or TasP/PrEP/PEP not used
 - Most common way HIV is transmitted worldwide
 - Transmission much more likely from penis to vagina than reverse
- Effective ways to make vaginal-penile sex safer:
 - Use a condom
 - 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



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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



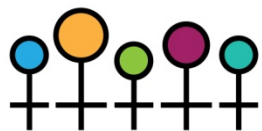
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Oral Sex

- 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 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

Oral-Vaginal Sex

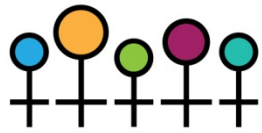
- Rare but documented cases of HIV being transmitted during oral-vaginal sex
- To make oral-vaginal sex safer:
 - Use a **dental dam** (latex square) or a condom that has been cut open
 - Put some water- or silicone-based lube on one side of dental dam or cut-open condom
 - Stretch dam or condom over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



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Oral-Anal Sex

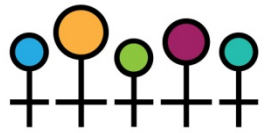
- Oral-anal sex has been shown to spread hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, as well as other infections
- To make oral-anal sex safer:
 - Use a dental dam or a condom that has been cut open
 - Put water- or silicone-based lube on one side of dental dam/condom
 - Stretch dam or condom over anus 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



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Sex with Sex Toys

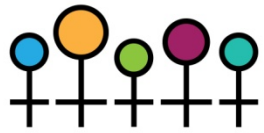
- STIs can be passed on by using sex toys (vibrators, etc.)
 - Sex toys need to be kept clean, ***whether used alone or with partners***
 - If not cleaned after each use, can grow bacteria, cause infection
 - Sex toys made of different materials must be cleaned in different ways
 - Read package insert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



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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

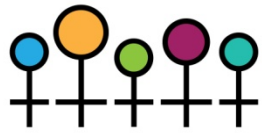


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No-Risk Safer Sex Activities

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

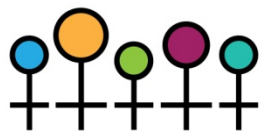
- Masturbation: touching your own genitals
- Phone sex, cybersex
- Talking dirty, sharing sexual fantasies
- Intimacy without sex: hugging, touching, massage



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



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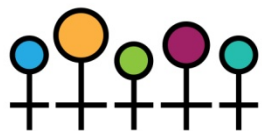
Think About It in New Ways

"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 or watching a video about hot safer sex?

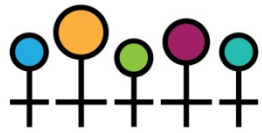


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Think About It in New Ways

"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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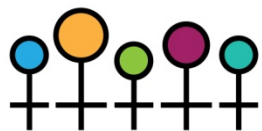
Think About It in New Ways

"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 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



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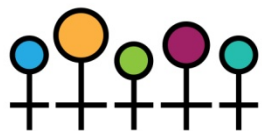
Think About It in New Ways

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

- **New idea: How comfortable are you 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



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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
 - [@thewellprojecthiv.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/@thewellprojecthiv)
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv/
 - www.threads.net/@thewellprojecthiv
 - www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv