

Let's Talk About Sex

Let's Talk About.... Anal Sex

Let's talk about anal sex without condoms (barebacking)

When you're the bottom (receptive partner):

When we're talking about anal sex, being topped by a guy without a condom, and having your partner cum inside you, is the most likely route for HIV. This is because the lining of your rectum can absorb liquids directly into your bloodstream. If there's HIV in his cum and it goes into your rectum that will be absorbed. If you are topped without a condom and he doesn't cum inside you, there is a lesser chance but, as there is HIV in pre-cum too, HIV transmission can still happen.

Bottoming without condoms is also a main route for most other STIs, including chlamydia, gonorrhoea, herpes, syphilis, LGV, warts, hepatitis A, B and increasingly hepatitis C as well. Condoms provide an effective barrier against most STIs, including HIV, although some STIs, such as syphilis and warts, can still be transmitted if the condom does not cover the entire infected area, such as the base of the penis.

If you have an STI in your rectum, it will increase the chances of you getting HIV if you are HIV-negative. If you are HIV-positive and have an STI, it is likely that there will be higher concentrations of HIV in all of your body fluids, including blood and anal mucus, and so you will be more infectious.

If the top is HIV-positive and has an undetectable viral load the risk of transmission is zero, once he has no other STIs. Learn more about being undetectable.

When you're the top (insertive partner):

Topping someone without a condom lowers the chance of HIV transmission more than bottoming without a condom, but it is still one of the main routes.

If you are HIV-negative, topping someone bareback can lead to HIV infection. This is because the anal mucus that lines the rectum can contain a very high concentration of HIV. The mucous membrane just inside the tip of the penis and the foreskin can absorb liquids, like anal mucus, directly into the bloodstream. It is also possible that blood, if present, can be responsible for transmission.

Other infections, such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, herpes, syphilis, warts and hepatitis can be passed to the top through his urethra (the hole at the top of your penis). Condoms can prevent most of the infections that you can get from topping, although it's worth remembering that some STIs can be transmitted even if you use condoms.

Let's talk about anal sex with condoms.

While condoms offer protection against HIV and most STIs, they cannot prevent them all. Even if you always use condoms for anal sex it is recommend that you get regular sexual health screens at a STI/GUM clinic and continue to test for HIV twice a year.

Condoms can break during anal sex and this could make it possible for HIV or other STIs to be transmitted. Condom breaks usually occur because condoms are used incorrectly or are used for long sessions without changing them. If you use condoms correctly with plenty of water-based lube, it will greatly reduce the chances of them breaking.

If you are having group sex, it's also important to change condoms for each partner. This is because it's theoretically possible that traces of HIV-infected anal mucus or blood could remain on a condom after a guy with HIV is topped. This is also true for

other STIs, including hepatitis C.

Let's talk about oral sex? (head / blowjobs)

When you're giving it:

It is theoretically possible to get HIV from giving head but the likelihood of this occurring is very low. No one knows exactly how risky it is, partly because most men who do it will also have other forms of sex as well and it is impossible to know which sexual act is responsible for the transmission of HIV.

The reason that oral sex is so much safer than anal sex is that the throat is not as vulnerable to infection as the rectum is. Saliva has properties that can disable some infections, including HIV, and so there needs to be quite a lot of HIV present for infection to take place. Also, the mouth and throat are not as efficient at absorbing liquids into the bloodstream as the lining of the rectum is. Even if you swallow cum, any HIV that may be there will usually be killed by the strong acids in your stomach.

Although the risk of HIV infection is fairly low, some other STIs can be easily passed via oral sex, such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, herpes or syphilis. These risks can be avoided by using a condom for oral sex.

There is a chance of picking up hepatitis B through oral sex, if you have not been vaccinated. If you have an existing STI in your throat you will be more vulnerable to infection and the chances of picking up HIV or Hep B are increased.

When you're getting it:

No one has ever caught HIV from getting head. However, you may be vulnerable to other STIs this way, such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, herpes and syphilis. This is because all of these STIs are much more infectious than HIV.

If you wanted to prevent the chances of getting an STI you should wear a condom for oral sex. As most men choose not to do this, it's advisable to have a regular sexual health check-up to ensure that any infections you may pick up can be detected and treated quickly.

Let's talk about fisting?

Fisting (inserting most or all of the hand into an ass) in itself presents only a small chance of transmission of HIV, as long as there are no open cuts, sores or the like on the hand – and even less if a fisting glove is worn.

However, fisting presents a much higher chance of rectal damage. A damaged rectum is much more vulnerable to infection through sex that may take place afterwards. When recreational drugs are also being used severe damage can take place without fully feeling the pain.

If more than one person is being fisted, in a group sex situation, HIV or hepatitis C could be passed from one guy to another, via anal mucus or blood carried on the fist.

Fisting can lead to the transmission of STIs, including hepatitis C. It is also possible to acquire a variety of gut infections such as Shigella, if traces of faeces (poo) get passed to the mouth.

Using oil-based lube for fisting can create issues if you then choose to have anal sex afterwards, as the oil in the lube will damage most condoms. If you think it is likely that you will fist and have anal sex, use water-based lubricant to fist or use a non-latex condom which will not be damaged by oil (like polyurethane condoms) to have anal sex.

Let's talk about rimming

There is no evidence to suggest that anyone has caught HIV from rimming, although there are other STIs to consider when rimming.

Hepatitis A & B is most often caught from rimming and gonorrhoea can also be passed on this way. There are also a number of gut infections you can get from rimming, most notably Shigella.

Even if your partner recently washed there may still be some extremely infectious, microscopic organisms present, but there is an even greater chance if you rim someone who hasn't washed beforehand, or who is experiencing diarrhoea.

The STIs associated with rimming can be prevented by using a dental dam, although not many guys use them. You can get dental dams and a vaccination against hepatitis A and B from your STI/GUM clinic.

Let's talk about sharing sex toys?

Dildos and buttplugs can be involved in the transmission of HIV, hepatitis A, B and C as well as other STIs, and a variety of gut infections if you share them.

Anal mucus or blood from a person on sex toys could lead to infections if the same toys are then used on someone else. Using toys may cause damage to the lining of the rectum. This damage can be microscopic, removing just the surface layer of the rectum's lining so it won't necessarily be severe or cause bleeding. If sex toy play is followed by unprotected anal, this damage means there is a greater chance of HIV & STI transmission.

The easiest way to avoid this is not to share sex toys.

You can also use a condom to cover the dildo, and change it between partners if using it on more than one person. Washing sex toys thoroughly after use, using warm soapy water or a sterilising fluid designed for baby bottles, should prevent any infection remaining on the toy.

Other toys like Fleshlites and sheaths should be cleaned between users to avoid passing on HIV or other STIs. If a guy with HIV or an STI cums inside a Fleshlite and another guy uses it afterwards, he could catch HIV or an STI through his foreskin, the head of his penis or his urethra.

The same is true of wanking sheaths. As with dildos, you should wash all toys thoroughly after use, using warm soapy water or a sterilising fluid designed for baby bottles. This should prevent any infection remaining on the toy.

Let's talk about watersports (piss play)

Watersports, in relation to sex, is used to describe urinating on someone. This carries no chance of HIV transmission. Urine does not contain infectious HIV so you can't catch it this way.

There is a chance of Hepatitis B infection if the urinating partner has hepatitis B. There may be a risk of other 'non-STI' infections like Cytomegalovirus (CMV).