

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF?

Safer sex begins with good communication. You must be willing to talk about sex, your feelings and personal needs, and your past or present sexual activity that puts you (and your sexual partner) at risk. Being honest shows concern and respect for yourself and your partner.

It's what you do, not who you are, that puts you at risk.

Safer sex means finding ways to prevent contact with body fluids or infected skin.

Kissing

Avoid wet kissing if you or your partner have a sore or cut in your mouth.

Grinding

Touching or rubbing against your partner's breast, thigh, or other body part is safe unless there is contact with body fluids or open cuts.

Fingering

Watch out for sores or cuts on fingers or the vagina. Wearing a latex glove is the safest way to prevent contact with body fluids.

Oral Sex

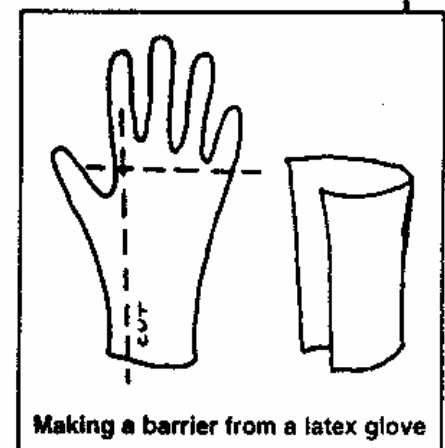
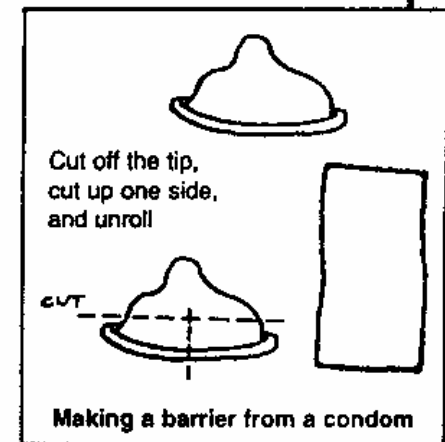
Oral sex includes both oral/vaginal ("going down") and oral/anal contact ("rimming"). Using a barrier, such as a dental dam, is the best way to protect yourself against contact with vaginal fluids, ejaculate, menstrual blood, or fecal matter. Lubricant on the "inside" of the barrier will increase sensation. Always use a water-based lube. Never re-use a barrier or share the same barrier.

Sex Toys

Sharing sex toys is risky and has been linked to transmission of HIV between women. If you share a sex toy, such as a dildo, cover it with a fresh condom each time you or your sexual partner use it. Some sex toys can be placed in the dishwasher (heat dry) for cleaning between use.

S&M

S&M is safest when no blood is involved. If you are piercing each other, don't use the same needle.



ARE WOMEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH OTHER WOMEN REALLY AT RISK FOR STDs AND HIV?

Yes—even for women who only have sex with women! Many STDs are just as common in women who have sex with women as those who have sex with men. STDs that have been shown to be present among lesbians and bisexual women in several health studies include HPV (genital warts) and genital herpes.

And, although the risk for transmitting HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) between women is not high, there are documented cases of woman-to-woman transmission.

HOW WOULD I KNOW IF I HAVE AN STD?

The best way for you to know if you have an STD is to get tested. If you don't have a regular doctor, your local health department clinic and Planned Parenthood usually provide low-cost screening.

Watch out for these signs:

- Change in vaginal discharge (color, odor, or consistency)
- Itching or burning
- Sores or blisters
- Pain during sex or other physical contact

If you think you might have an STD or HIV, you should make an appointment with your doctor. For more information:

Websites

*American Social Health Association
Facts & Answers about STDs*
<http://www.ashastd.org/stdfaqs/index.html>

*University of Washington
Lesbian STDs*
<http://depts.washington.edu/wswstd/index.htm>

*Planned Parenthood
Sexually Transmitted Infections*
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/sti/>

Hotlines

CDC National STD and AIDS Hotline
(800) 227-8922 or (800) 342-2437

National Herpes Hotline
(919) 361-8488



Lesbian Resource Center
PO Box 1589; Durham, NC 27702
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Safer Sex for Lesbians and Bisexual Women

