

How Safe Is Oral Sex?

(adapted from a pamphlet by the STOP AIDS Project)

Have People been infected with HIV through oral sex?

- The San Francisco Department of Public Health has recorded at least three cases of men who have become infected with HIV through oral sex. This isn't very many, considering how many men have oral sex. Other cases have been reported elsewhere.
- Unprotected oral sex is certainly much safer than unprotected anal or vaginal sex. The lining of the mouth is much tougher and less permeable than the lining of the vagina or anus. Saliva may neutralize the virus. It's easier to get semen out of your mouth than a vagina or anus.
- Receptive oral sex - sucking dick, or going down on someone - is certainly riskier than having someone suck or go down on you.
- HIV is in pre-cum, as well as in semen. But there's usually less pre-cum than semen during any one sexual act. It's unlikely that pre-cum by itself can transmit HIV, but it's possible.
- The length and intensity of the sexual act may affect transmission. If his dick is pounding against the back of your throat, your tissues may become irritated, becoming more permeable and increasing the likelihood of infection.
- The presence of other sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) can increase the likelihood of transmission through providing easier ways for the virus to enter the body. If you have had unprotected oral sex and you have a sore throat or a dry cough, get tested for oral gonorrhea and strep. If you have sores, discharge, or burning when you pee go to your doctor or STD clinic.
- Some people are more susceptible to infections than others. Some people have better oral hygiene than others. Bleeding gums, sores in the mouth, and abscessed teeth may increase the likelihood of transmission. HIV-positive men and women may be more or less capable of infecting others, depending on how long they've been infected themselves.

What can I do make oral sex safer?

- Avoid coming in someone's mouth. Or having them come in yours. Remember, even with pre-cum there's still some risk. "Swallow or spit, don't let it sit."
- You can also avoid sucking the tip of the penis, concentrating on the shaft instead. Place non-lubed condom inside out like a little cap over the head of the penis.
- Oral-vaginal sex (cunnilingus) with someone of unknown HIV status is also relatively low risk. The risk of infection with STD's is higher if there is menstrual blood or an unusual vaginal discharge. Make your partner a Saran Wrap panty or use a latex dental dam with a harness for even safer oral sex.
- If you see something suspicious - a sore or a discharge on someone's penis or a funny odor or or sores on the vulva, avoid going down on it.
- Know your STD status and don't put yourself or others at unnecessary risk. Get checked for STDs including gonorrhea, herpes, and syphilis.
- Consider using condoms for oral sex. Try Kimono Micro Thins, Lifestyles "Kiss of Mint," or Trustex condoms which have flavored lubricants (available in many flavors). And don't knock it until you've tried it. Condoms without spermicide taste a lot better.
- Avoid deep throating. It can irritate the tissue at the back of the throat, and possibly provide a more efficient route for HIV to enter the body. Floss and brush regularly - but not right before you have oral sex. If you want to freshen up your breath before kissing your partner, try mouthwash. Schedule a dental check-up too! Above all, make the choice that's right for you. If ten minutes - or ten hours - after you've had sex, you're anxious about what you did, that's a good time to consider reducing your risk.