

Consider using condoms for oral sex, especially if you have lots of sexual partners.

Even if you don't use a condom every time, or for every type of sex, use one as often as possible – this is safer than not at all.

Even if you occasionally did not use a condom that does not mean it is not worth using a condom every time in future.

Which condoms should I use?

Use a "kite marked" condom that is within its sell-by date

A "kitemark" is a mark of safety and quality and looks like this:



All kite marked condoms (male latex, male non-latex and female condoms) are very effective, so the important thing is to use the type that suits you and your partner.

Non latex condoms are a good choice for some men, but are a bit more likely to break than latex condoms.

Use non-latex condoms if you have a latex allergy (or if you are using creams or treatments that damage latex condoms).

Female condoms are at least as good as male condoms at preventing STIs.

You get better at using condoms the more you use them.

Practising opening and using a condom alone, and in the dark, might make it easier to do when you have sex.

Does size matter?

Yes, with condoms size matters!

Make sure you or your partner use a condom of the right size. Condoms are more likely to split if too tight.

The girth (thickness/width) of the penis may be more important than penis length.

Try a range of condom sizes (such as Trim, Standard, Large/XL and Superking/XXL) to find what fits you best, or measure round your erect penis using a strip of paper to find the correct diameter of condom for you.

How to use condoms

Open the packet carefully – don't use your teeth and avoid damaging the condom with your nails, jewellery or piercings. Put the condom on before you start having sex and leave it on all the way through.

- remove all the air from the condom before putting it on
- hold the condom during withdrawal (pulling out)
- don't unroll it before putting it on
- put the condom on before you start having sex
- if you put it on the wrong way by mistake, use another one - don't just flip it over

Using condoms for anal sex

Ordinary condoms are no more likely than thicker condoms to break or slip off during anal sex.

Some people feel safer using thicker ('Extra' or 'Strong') condoms for anal sex, but there is no proof that they are any safer than regular condoms.

You can use female condoms instead of male condoms for anal sex: remove the ring at the end of the condom and place on the penis like a male condom.

Using lubricant with condoms

Anal sex: put a water or silicon based lubricant (NOT an oil based one) all over the condom and inside the anus (but not inside the condom) before anal sex.

Vaginal sex: Lubricant can make vaginal sex more comfortable or pleasurable, but you do not need to use extra lubricant for vaginal sex routinely. Lubricant does not make sex safer and increases the chance that the condom will slip off.

More information:

<http://www.bashh.org/guidelines>

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a guide to - Safer Sex



British Association for
Sexual Health and HIV

Safer Sex Advice

Safer sex is not 'all or nothing'

You can make sex safer by doing some of the things suggested in this leaflet - for instance, just for some types of sex or with some sexual partners – even if you don't do all of them all of the time.

What is safer sex?

Safer sex means having sex with less risk of transmission (catching or passing on) a sexually transmitted infection (STI). STIs include HIV, syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, trichomonas, Herpes simplex (Herpes simplex virus/HSV), hepatitis B, and warts (human papilloma virus/HPV).

The risk of catching each infection is different, and also varies according to the type of sex you are having (such as oral, vaginal or anal sex).

For example

Herpes is often passed on through oral sex, but HIV is rarely passed on this way.

Anal sex carries the highest risk of passing on infections such as HIV and hepatitis, followed by vaginal and then oral sex.

Non-penetrative sex (such as body rubbing and mutual masturbation) carries the lowest risk, but some infections (such as warts and herpes) can be passed on in this way.

How do I make sex safer?

You can reduce the risk of all infections by:

Using condoms for all types of penetrative sex (vaginal, anal sex especially; you may also want to consider condoms for oral sex)

Having non penetrative sex (such as body rubbing and mutual masturbation)

Being tested for STIs before having sex with someone new, and advising that they also get tested.

Reducing the number of partners you have sex with.

Getting vaccinated against certain infections.

For example, hepatitis B (and A). If you are at risk – ask a doctor, nurse or health advisor about this.

Planning on how you will protect yourself and your

sexual partners from infections when under the influence of alcohol or other recreational drugs.

How risky is oral sex?

Oral sex can include fellatio (sucking a penis), cunnilingus (licking female genitals) or oro-anal contact (anal licking or "rimming")

Herpes, warts, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B and, possibly, other infections can be transmitted through oral sex.

For most infections (except herpes), the risk of catching an infection is greater for the oral partner (the one giving oral sex).

Most people do not use protection (condoms or dental dams) for oral sex.

The risk of catching an STI through unprotected oral sex is lower than for unprotected vaginal or anal sex, but is not zero.

How do I make oral sex safer?

Reduce the number of partners with whom you have oral sex.

Avoiding oral sex with ejaculation reduces the risk of HIV (and possibly other infections)

Insertive fellatio (being sucked) is lower risk than receptive fellatio (sucking a penis).

Avoid brushing teeth or flossing before having oral sex.

Avoid oral sex if you have oral cuts or sores, or a sore throat.

Use condoms for fellatio.

Other sorts of sex

No form of sexual contact is entirely without risk of STI transmission. Non penetrative contact (body rubbing, mutual masturbation without penetration) carries the lowest risk.

Herpes can be transmitted through kissing, and it may be possible to transmit other STIs (including syphilis and Hepatitis B) in this way, although the risk is lower than for penetrative sex.

If you are fingering, using sex toys or fisting your partner, the risk of transmission is related to the degree of trauma – how much damage is done to the delicate lining of the vagina or anus.

Use latex or non-latex gloves for digital penetrative sex if there is a risk of trauma.

What if my partner(s) or I are living with HIV?

All the previous advice applies to you.

If you are living with HIV, staff at your clinic will be able to give you detailed advice on safer sex.

Taking effective antiretroviral therapy (ART) and having an undetectable plasma/blood HIV viral load significantly reduces the risk of HIV transmission during sex.

Even with an undetectable viral load, there is still a small risk of HIV transmission. This is higher for anal sex than for vaginal or oral sex.

Continuing to use condoms for vaginal, anal (and oral) sex will further reduce any remaining risk of transmission.

Poor adherence (missing doses of ART) may increase the risk of HIV transmission.

If you are living with HIV or you have partners who are or may be HIV positive, have an STI check regularly depending on your sexual activity, and at least once a year if you're sexually active.

Condoms

Do condoms work?

Yes - for heterosexual (straight) couples and men who have sex with men (MSM), using condoms every time you have sex reduces the transmission of HIV and other STIs.

Condoms are thought to be almost 100% effective in preventing HIV transmission if used perfectly all of the time.

In real life most people do not use condoms perfectly, or for every type of sex, so protection may be less than this.

Condoms also reduce the risk of catching or passing on chlamydia, gonorrhoea, herpes, warts and syphilis.

Whilst they do help, no method is perfect, so using a condom cannot guarantee that you will not catch an STI.

Condom advice:

Use a condom every time you have vaginal or anal sex to minimise the risk of transmission of HIV and other STIs.