

# sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

## wildfact

STDs used to be commonly called venereal diseases (aka VD). “Venereal” is a reference to Venus, the Roman goddess of love.

## Q Can you get an STD from a toilet seat?

A. Whether you cover, hover, or go *au naturel*, your approach to toilet seats may have something to do with how you answer this question. And even though you may have heard otherwise, the truth is you can NOT get a sexually transmitted disease (STD) from a toilet seat – unless you happen to be having sex on one!

For “standard” toilet use, a viable STD would have to find a way to make direct, prolonged contact with your genitals, or find a cut or sore on your body. Before that, however, the STD would have to survive on the toilet seat, itself an unlikely prospect, since surfaces like toilet seats are lousy places for STDs to survive for any length of time. Even after you add up all the “what ifs,” STD-by-seat is very close to impossible.

Yes, there are plenty of other bugs lurking in public restrooms, but the good news is they are no match for a healthy immune system and a thorough hand washing. So

where are the hot spots for bathroom germs, you ask? According to research done at the UA, the leading culprit is bathroom sinks, since the water there provides the right conditions for bugs to breed. Anything with a handle (toilet, faucet, paper towel dispenser, door) can also be a place for fecal bacteria to reside, since 1/3 of bathroom goers don't wash their hands at all after using the facilities, and many more don't wash for as long as they should (20-30 seconds).

The take home message here is wash your hands well, but try not to fear the toilet seat. If you want to avoid an STD, your energy is better spent using condoms or latex dams if you are sexually active – or abstaining from sex altogether. Short on condoms? Stop by Free Condom Friday at UA Campus Health, every Friday during the fall and spring semesters from 12-2pm.



Have a question? Send it to [sextalk@email.arizona.edu](mailto:sextalk@email.arizona.edu)

SexTalk is written by Lee Ann Hamilton, M.A., CHES, David Salafsky, MPH, and Carrie Hardesty, BS, CHES, health educators at The UA Campus Health Service.