

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid 81% of UA students had either one or no sexual partners during the past school year. (2004 Health & Wellness Survey, n=1434)

Q. My questions concern lesbian sex. What are the risks? I feel like lesbians don't get real answers to these questions because it is P.C. to tell us to have "safer sex." REALLY, how risky is oral sex or hand to genital contact? Also, can strap-ons or vibrators carry diseases between partners? And, just how necessary are dental dams and gloves? Thanks for addressing a topic often overlooked.

A. Although sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially HIV, are less common among lesbians, it is false to say that sex between women is without risk. *Really* – sexual health risk has virtually nothing to do with who you are or who you're sexually attracted to, but has a lot to do with *what* you do and *how* you do it. Because some people with STIs are symptom-free, it's always better to "play" safer than sorry.

STIs are spread in two ways: 1) skin to skin contact with an infected partner, and 2) contact with bodily fluids of an infected partner (i.e., genital secretions, blood [including menstrual blood], breast milk, secretions from STI sores, etc). Since unprotected oral sex involves both, it definitely qualifies as a risky activity. If hand-to-genital contact involves touching both your and your partners' genitals, or if you have open cuts or sores on your hand, then this would also qualify as risky.

Here are some strategies to minimize risk of STI transmission during lesbian sex (these are equally effective for any set of partners):

- During oral sex, cover the entire vaginal or anal area with a large square of latex (dental dam), plastic wrap, or a cut-open condom or latex glove. This is also applicable for vulva-to-vulva sex.
- It's best not to share sex toys (e.g., strap-on dildos, vibrators); but if sharing takes place, wash the toys in hot, soapy water or clean them with a bleach solution in between users. Or, place a fresh condom on the toy in between users.
- Hand-to-genital penetration of the vagina or anus can be risky, especially if you have open sores or cuts on your hands. To minimize risk, wear latex gloves, condoms or finger cots on your hands, and always change them out when moving from anus to vagina, or between partners.
- Talk with your partner about STIs before you are sexually active with her. Since people are not always aware that they've been exposed to an STI, many will choose to be tested, either independently or with their partners, before getting intimately involved.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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