

# sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

**factoid** On Tuesday, May 8, 2001, Governor Jane Dee Hull repealed a law that banned oral sex in the state of Arizona.

## Q. Is oral sex safer than intercourse when it comes to STDs?

A. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can be contracted through oral sex, despite persistent beliefs that characterize this sexual activity as risk-free. That being said, assessing the risks of oral sex compared with intercourse depends on the STD. Herpes, for example, can be readily transmitted through oral to genital contact from viral shedding that takes place even in the absence of visible sores. In this case, oral herpes – the common virus that causes cold sores around the mouth – can infect and show up in the genital region after oral/genital contact.

Other STDs may also be spread during oral sex, but tend to be more commonly passed through vaginal or anal intercourse. These include HIV, HPV (genital warts), hepatitis B, chlamydia, syphilis and gonorrhea. Exposure to semen, “pre-cum”, blood or vaginal fluid increases the chance of getting an STD. Because of potential contact with these fluids, the person who performs oral sex is generally more likely to get an infection than the receiver.

Reducing your risk of STDs through oral sex is easy, but requires barrier methods that many people are reluctant to adopt. These include wearing a non-lubricated/spermicide-free condom prior to performing oral sex on a man, and use of a latex dam (a very thin 5" x 5" square that lays over the vulva) when going down on a woman. In addition to these precautions, going with your partner to get tested and having a monogamous relationship are good ways to decrease your risk while boosting your peace of mind.

Confidential, convenient STD testing is available at the Campus Health Service, located in the Highland Commons Building near 6th St. and Highland. To schedule an appointment, call 621-9202. All UA students are eligible for care at Campus Health. Walk-ins are welcome and you need not have health insurance to be seen. For more information on sexually transmitted diseases go to [www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org), or check out [www.health.arizona.edu](http://www.health.arizona.edu) and search for “STD”.

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

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