

# sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

wildfact

**72% of UA students have had oral sex.**

(2013 Health & Wellness Survey, n=3,055)

## Q Can you get an STD from oral sex?

A. Yes, you can. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be contracted through oral sex – whether it’s a “blow job” or “going down” on a partner. Herpes, chlamydia, and gonorrhea are just a few of the infections spread by oral sex, and you can’t tell if someone has an infection or not. The Herpes Simplex virus can be readily transmitted in skin-to-skin contact even when sores are not visible.

Of recent interest is the growing body of research, indicating that Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), particularly Type 16, is now the main cause of most oral cancers (not tobacco and alcohol as in the past). HPV is spread through direct contact with the skin, genitals, mouth, and anus.

Does this mean you shouldn’t have any sex (oral or otherwise)? No. But the research indicates that everyone (ages 11-26) should get vaccinated against HPV. Gardasil and Cervarix vaccines are extremely effective in preventing the strains of HPV (types 16 and 18) that are strongly linked with cancers of the cervix, penis, anus, and now, mouth.

Other STIs may be spread during oral sex but are more commonly passed via vaginal

or anal intercourse. These infections include hepatitis B, syphilis, HIV, and HPV (genital warts and cervical dysplasia).

Exposure to semen, “pre-cum,” blood, or vaginal fluid increases the chance of getting an STI. Both the giver and the receiver can be at risk. Reduce your STI risk by using a flavored condom when performing oral sex on a man or using a latex dam (a very thin 5" x 5" square that lays over the vulva) when going down on a woman. Dams can be used for oral-anal sex, too. Buy them at Campus Health or online.

If reading this gets you worried about what you’ve done in the past, take action. Find out your STI status. You can get confidential, convenient tests at Campus Health, Planned Parenthood, or Pima County Health Department. For more info on STIs go to [www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org) or [www.health.arizona.edu](http://www.health.arizona.edu).



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