

## Safer Sex ("Safe Sex")

### Safer Sex ("Safe Sex") at a Glance

- Reduces our risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection
- Using condoms makes vaginal or anal intercourse safer sex
- Using condoms or other barriers makes oral sex safer sex
- Having sex play without intercourse can be even safer sex
- Safer sex can be very pleasurable and exciting

We all care about protecting ourselves and the ones we love. For sexually active people that means practicing safer sex. We can use it to reduce our risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease ([STD](#)). It lets us protect ourselves — and our partners — while we enjoy [sex play](#) with them. Safer sex is for responsible people who care about their and their partners' pleasure and health.

### What Is Safer Sex?

Safer sex is anything we do during sex play to reduce our risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection. Even though a lot of people say "safe sex" instead of "safer sex," there is no kind of skin-to-skin sex play with a partner that is totally risk-free. But being "safer" is something all of us can do.

These are the most important ways to practice safer sex:

- Understand and be honest about the risks we take.
- Keep our blood, pre-cum, semen, or vaginal fluids out of each other's bodies.
- Always use [latex](#) or [female condoms](#) for anal or vaginal intercourse.
- Don't have sex play when we have a sore caused by a sexually transmitted infection.
- Find ways to make safer sex as pleasurable as possible.

### Sex play and Risk- A Review

#### No-risk safer sex play includes

- masturbation
- mutual masturbation
- [cybersex](#)
- [phone sex](#)
- sharing fantasies

#### Low-risk safer sex play includes

- kissing
- fondling — manual stimulation of one another
- sexy massage
- body-to-body rubbing — frottage, "grinding," or "dry humping"
- [oral sex](#) (even safer with a condom or other barrier)
- playing with sex toys — alone or with a partner

#### The highest risk kinds of sex play are

- vaginal intercourse
- anal intercourse

Luckily, we can use condoms during vaginal and anal intercourse to make them safer.

### CONDOMS FOR SAFER SEX

Condoms work by forming a barrier between the penis and anus, vagina, or mouth. The barrier keeps one partner's fluids from getting into or on the other. And condoms reduce the amount of skin-to-skin contact. There are two main kinds of condoms — latex condoms and female condoms.

- [Latex condoms](#) are great safer sex tools for anal or vaginal intercourse. People with latex allergies can use condoms made of polyurethane. They also make sex safer, but they are not as widely available as latex condoms.
- [Female condoms](#) reduce your risk of infection, too. Female condoms aren't quite as easy to find as latex condoms, but they are available in some drugstores and many Planned Parenthood health centers. Unlike male condoms, female condoms do not require a penis to be erect.

**Not all sexually transmitted infections are passed in the same way.** Here are the basics:

### **UNPROTECTED VAGINAL OR ANAL INTERCOURSE — HIGH RISK FOR PASSING**

- [chancroid](#)
- [chlamydia](#)
- [cytomegalovirus \(CMV\)](#)
- [genital warts](#)
- [gonorrhea](#)
- [hepatitis B](#)
- [herpes](#)
- [human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\)](#)
- [human papilloma virus \(HPV\)](#)
- [pelvic inflammatory disease \(PID\)](#)
- [pubic lice](#)
- [scabies](#)
- [syphilis](#)
- [trichomoniasis](#)

### **UNPROTECTED ORAL SEX — HIGH RISK FOR PASSING**

- CMV
- gonorrhea
- hepatitis B
- herpes
- syphilis

### **SKIN-TO-SKIN SEX PLAY WITHOUT SEXUAL INTERCOURSE — RISKY FOR PASSING**

- CMV
- herpes
- HPV
- pubic lice
- scabies



#### **Is Oral Sex Safer Sex?**

When it comes to HIV, oral sex is safer sex than vaginal or anal intercourse. But other infections, like herpes, syphilis, and hepatitis B, can be passed by oral sex. Condoms or other barriers can also be used to make oral sex even safer.

#### **How Can I Use Sheer Glyde or Dental Dams to Make Oral Sex Safer?**

Dental dams are small, thin, square pieces of latex used to protect the throat during certain kinds of dental work. They can also be placed on the vulva or the anus when the mouth, lips, or tongue are used to sexually arouse a partner. Like the condom, dams keep partners' body fluids

out of each other's bodies. They also prevent skin-to-skin contact. If Sheer Glyde dams or other dental dams aren't handy, you can use plastic wrap or a cut-open condom.

### **How Can I Have Safer Sex with My Sex Toys?**

Many people like to spice up sex play with sex toys — [dildos](#), [vibrators](#), [strap-ons](#), [butt plugs](#), and more. These toys need special care, too, when used alone or with partners. Unless they are kept clean between uses, they can build up bacteria, which can cause an infection. And if they are shared between partners, they can pass along sexually transmitted infections.

The best way to keep sex toys clean and safe is to protect them with a latex condom. The condom should be changed whenever the toy is passed from partner to partner or from one body opening to another — mouth, anus, or vagina.

If you don't use condoms to keep a sex toy clean, it's important to clean it before and after every use. Sex toys are made of many different materials — silicone, jelly rubber, vinyl, stainless steel, acrylic, etc. They all may have to be cleaned different ways. Some toys can be soaked in water — and some cannot. Please read the instructions on the package carefully. Never use breakable household objects, like glass bottles, as sex toys.

Keeping your sex toys clean will help them last longer, and they'll give you pleasure instead of infections!

### **How Can I Use Lubricant for Safer Sex?**

A good lubricant can go a long way in making sure that safer sex is pleasurable and fun. Lubricant is important in safer sex because it also makes condoms and dams slippery and less likely to break. Lubricants make safer sex feel better by cutting down on the dry kind of friction that a lot of people find irritating.

When buying a bottle of lube, it's important to find the [right kind](#) — one that works for you and one that works for your condom. Never use oil-based lube with a latex condom — it can break down latex. Use only water or silicone-based lube with latex.

### **What About Safer Sex and Drugs and Alcohol?**

Alcohol and other drugs can make you forget you promised yourself to have safer sex. The use of too much alcohol or any amount of drugs often leads to high-risk sex.

### **How Does Safer Sex Make Sex Feel Better?**

Worrying about sexually transmitted infections can make sex less satisfying. Safer sex can reduce that worry. Practicing safer sex can also help you and your partner

- add variety to sexual pleasure
- make sex play last longer by postponing orgasms
- increase intimacy and trust
- strengthen relationships
- improve communication — verbal and nonverbal

The bottom line is that safer sex can be fun. It is a great way to explore who we are sexually, express our feelings, bond with others, and have a good time. Practicing safer sex can enhance our pleasure — and who doesn't want more pleasure?