

What is Safer Sex?

Many people living with HIV find ways to have safer sex and continue to enjoy sex.

Abstinence is a safe sex choice.

About one-third of HIV positive people choose to not have sex.

Remember, HIV needs two things to pass from one person to another:

A body fluid that can pass HIV.

Blood, pre-cum (pre-ejaculatory fluid), semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk.

A way into the body.

HIV can get in through the mouth, vagina, anus or the opening on the head of the penis.

It can get in when you have sex without a condom, when body fluids get into an open cut or sore, or when you share needles to inject drugs.

If you have sex and body fluids are shared, you don't protect yourself from giving HIV to your partner. But there are many things you *can* do, if you are careful. On the other side we've listed some things you can do to have safer sex.

"Sometimes I just don't want to be bothered with condoms. There are sexy things I can do that are safe without condoms, but there are real limits on what we can do so I keep them nearby."

"I use condoms because I never know what we will want to do when we start - so I'm ready for anything."

ACTIVITY

MAKING IT SAFER

Touching, massage, sexual stimulation of yourself or your partner without the exchange of body fluids

These are all safer activities.

For sexual stimulation of yourself or your partner, you and your partner may choose to use latex gloves, finger cots or condoms to reduce the risk of sharing body fluids.

Oral sex

While oral sex is considered a lower risk activity, there is still some risk. To make it safer, **use a latex condom** on a man and a **latex square, Sheerglyde dam®**, or **plastic wrap** (don't use the microwavable kind) on a woman. Latex condoms actually come in different flavors for oral sex!

If you don't use a condom, you may be able to reduce your risk by not letting your partner ejaculate (cum) in your mouth.

Using a condom/plastic wrap for oral sex may sound strange, but give it a try...it decreases the risk, so you don't have to worry.

If you don't use a latex square, Sheerglyde dam® or plastic wrap for oral/anal sex you may get diseases passed by mouth to anus contact that are really hard on your immune system.

Vaginal and anal sex

Unprotected vaginal or anal sex is the most risky activity for passing HIV because HIV can pass through the lining of the anus and vagina.

If you don't use a latex condom every time you have sex, you and your partner are not protected from other STDs or HIV.

To be even safer, use a condom and pull out before ejaculating.

Also, keep semen and vaginal fluid away from the face, genitals, or any open sores.

Using sex toys

It's best not to share sex toys, but if you do, use a new latex condom on the toy each time someone uses it.

Wash the toy with bleach and clean it with very hot and soapy water afterwards.

If you use toys for sexual enjoyment, it's not hard to make them safe.

How to tell someone you have sex with that you have HIV

It may be hard to tell your sex partner you have HIV. But there are a lot of people with HIV who are sexually active and have told their sex partners. Others have done it. You can too.

I'm interested in dating. When do I tell my HIV status to someone new?

It is really important to bring up the subject before you have sex.

You will need to decide a way to tell that feels most comfortable for you. Here are some ideas:

You may want to tell a new date when you first meet him or her and before you've become involved.

You may want to wait until you get to know the person a little.

If you don't share your HIV status, you're going to worry about telling him or her afterwards, which is really hard to do.

You may want to ask other people who are HIV positive how they talk about it.

HIV negative friends may tell you how they would like to be told.

There are also support groups, therapists and articles to help you.

Here are some suggestions to help you stick with your decision to talk about it.

Pick a time and place to talk

You will need a place that is quiet.

Pick a place that is safe.

It's best if you are both sober and calm.

Let the person know WHY you are telling him or her

"Because I respect you." "To protect your health." "Because I want to be honest." If the conversation becomes angry, take a break to calm down.

Practice

Have a friend pretend to be the person you want to tell. Have your friend react in a variety of ways so you can figure out how to handle different reactions. Saying the words out loud will help you feel more confident when you decide to share this information.

How do I tell someone I have HIV? What do I say?

Everyone has to decide for himself or herself what approach is most comfortable. Here is what some people say:

"I tell them 'Hi, I'm Mark and I'm HIV positive' as soon as I meet them. Even though some people are surprised, they admire my honesty and directness."

"I waited to tell my new sex partner, and then it got difficult to bring it up at all. When I finally told him, he was angry that I hadn't been honest from the beginning. I know he was right, so now I tell right away."

"If I'm thinking of having sex with someone, I tell them I have HIV. I have to live with myself. Sometimes this ends the relationship but still - first of all I need to live with myself. The consequences of not telling are just something I don't want to deal with."

"I have a relationship with a guy who is HIV negative. I told him first and then we worked out how to have protected sex. I just said it - and then I said 'you know you are safer with me than if you go with some person who won't tell you the truth.'"

"I like long term relationships - there is no way to have that without telling first. Would you stay with someone who wouldn't tell you first? So I just made peace with knowing that, if I want a long term relationship then I need to tell - I wouldn't want to deal with telling later."

"I didn't tell my girlfriend. It was just not something I knew how to talk about. But I was so afraid she would get pregnant and then the baby might get it too. I couldn't live with it, so I told her and told her to get a test."

Here are some of the consequences of not telling someone you have HIV:

Your sex partner might eventually find out anyhow, and will probably be very angry that you weren't honest.

You'll feel bad about yourself for not telling.

It may be difficult to enjoy sex if you're constantly worried about your partner finding out.

By not telling right away, you're going to have to figure

out how to tell later, which will be much more difficult than telling right away.

You cannot find a loving relationship if you don't tell. There will always be something hidden. You probably would not want to be with someone who hides something this important from you either.

You might infect someone you really care about.

Answers to your important questions about safer sex and viral load.

Q: If my viral load is undetectable is it still necessary to use condoms?

A: First, it is important to understand what it means to have an undetectable viral load. You can give HIV to someone as long as there is virus in your system and it may take only a small amount of virus to infect another person.

The viral load test measures the amount of viral genetic material present in your blood. An undetectable viral load means the treatment is working for you but it does not mean you are cured. It means either that your virus is not reproducing or that it is reproducing at a rate too low for the test to measure. It does not mean that the virus is gone. Even if it is inactive right now in you it can still be passed to another person and cause HIV infection in him or her. There is still virus in your blood, in your lymph tissues and in semen or vaginal secretions.

It's still important to use condoms. Even though your viral load is undetectable, you still have HIV. If you don't use condoms you could pass the virus to others.

If you don't use condoms, you could get other STDs and other strains of HIV that may not respond to medication.

"I thought when the doctor told me that my viral load was undetectable that I couldn't give HIV to anyone, so me and my wife stopped using the condoms. But then I heard that I could still give it to her. So she had to take an HIV test. We're waiting for the results...I'm frightened that I may have infected her."

"We both have HIV, but I heard somewhere that there are lots of different kinds...kinda like colds...even though you have one, you can still get another one, and then get sicker. It's hard. I'd rather not get another infection."

"My viral load is down and my T cells are up, I feel good. But I am getting careless, I want to forget about the HIV and just go back to being as free as I was before all of this happened. But then I catch myself and make sure I use protection - I don't want to think about it but I know I need to - I don't want any more regrets in my life."

WITH A LITTLE CREATIVITY CONDOMS CAN MAKE SEX SAFER AND MORE SENSUAL

The Basics

- Use latex condoms (not animal skin).
- Try "Avanti" condoms if you are allergic to latex.
- Check the expiration date on the condom package.
- Check to see that the condom is in good condition (not cracked, no holes).
- Use a new one every time.
- Store condoms in a cool, dry place.
- Carry one with you so you are always prepared.
- Use a water based lubricant like K-Y brand or Astroglide.
- Don't use baby oil, hand lotions or Vaseline Petroleum Jelly. Oil based lubricants can break the condom.
- You can pick up free condoms at this clinic just ask!

Tricks to make condoms more enjoyable

- Find the condom that's right for you.
- Condoms come in different brands, shapes, sizes, styles and thickness.
- Shop together for condoms and lubricants. This can be part of the fun.
- Practice with them until you find one or two that feel good and work for you or your partner.
- Try using a variety of lubricants to enhance the pleasure.
- You may be able to find flavored lubricants to put on the outside of your latex condom or latex barrier if you don't like the taste of rubber.
- Try the flavored condoms!
- Always use a condom before starting intercourse; however, if you have trouble keeping your erection with a condom on, continue to stimulate yourself to remain aroused.
- A little water based lubricant (pea sized) in the **inside** tip enhances sensation.

"I used to hate using condoms, but then I realized I couldn't relax and enjoy sex because of how much risk I was taking. I was just scared a lot of the time. The feelings of guilt are not worth it."

"For extra sensation, my man slips a little K-Y Jelly into the inside tip of his condom. It's not enough to make the condom come off and it adds more feeling for him."

"I think using rubbers is a drag, but my boyfriend says he cannot enjoy sex when we don't use one. He feels afraid and he doesn't last as long."

Female condoms

The REALITY female condom is inserted in the vagina. It is made of soft plastic and has a soft ring at each end. One ring stays outside the vagina and the other ring is inserted in the vagina and holds it in place. The "Basics" are similar to those for the male condom.

- Use a new one with each sex act.
- Do not remove the inner ring of the condom.
- Don't tear the condom (watch your rings and fingernails).
- Use extra lubricant if you need it.
- You can insert the REALITY condom right before or up to 8 hours before sex.
- Make sure the penis is inserted inside the REALITY condom and not to the side.
- Remove the REALITY condom after sex and before you stand up.
- You can get a free REALITY condom at this clinic. Just ask your provider for one and for the instruction pamphlet.

"I use the REALITY condom because I don't have to depend on my boyfriend to put on a condom. If I don't use the female condom I can't protect myself and can't keep him free of HIV."

BUILDING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

We all need to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of connection with friends, family, lovers, and our community. Building supportive relationships will help you care for yourself and help you care for other people who are important to you. In fact, building supportive and caring relationships with other people can help you feel better in many ways.

Here are some things you can do:

What to do

Ways to do it

How others have done it

Decide What You Want in a Relationship

Your love life doesn't have to end once you get HIV. You still have needs for love and intimacy. There are many choices that people living with HIV make that range from not having sex at all to having an active sex life using protection. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- < Do I want to date casually but not have sex?
- < Do I want a life-time companion who I share a committed, monogamous relationship with?
- < Do I want to date other people who are HIV positive? If so, what will we do so neither of us get another strain of HIV or an STD?
- < If I meet someone who is HIV negative what will we do to avoid infection if we decide to have sex?
- < How will I discuss my HIV with a new sex partner?

"When I first found out I had HIV, I decided that I would never have sex again. But, that was a few months ago. Now I'm ready to get back into it. And I figure as long as we use protection and talk about it—we're cool."

Stay Connected with Family, Friends, and Lovers

Your family, friends, and lovers can be great sources of support to you. Stay connected with people in your life who are supportive and you think will understand.

- < Don't wait for a call--take the lead.
- < Invite friends and acquaintances to do things with you--like see a movie or go for a walk.
- < Stay in touch with family members you feel comfortable with.
- < Have a party at your place.

"I've been HIV positive for 5 years now; and I met my life partner 3 years ago. I told him right off that I have HIV. He's HIV negative, so we only have safer sex and always use condoms. He's a wonderful person, and we both feel very fortunate to have found each other."

"I kept so much inside and felt so much shame. I never told anyone until I finally talked to my best friend--she's been so good to me."

"I was feeling so blue I spent all my time alone. Then I realized that I don't have to feel this way. I made myself go out and do things. I met some nice people, and now I feel much better."

What to do

Find Support and a Caring Community

Ways to do it

There are many organizations in our community devoted to people living with HIV. Ask us for resources that may be helpful for you.

Many organizations offer:

- < Useful information about HIV and AIDS
- < Parties and other social events
- < Support groups and other services you may need
- < A place to talk with other people who are also HIV positive and my have issues like yours.

Build Relationships with Your Doctor and Other Health Care Providers

We at the clinic care about you and want to help you as well as we can. We invite you to share your concerns and talk with us openly about your life and things that are important to you. That helps us to know you better and to meet your needs in the best way possible.

Give Support to Others

Giving support to others is a great way to feel good about yourself. When you support another person, that person will want be there for you in times of need.

- < Offer to help a friend with something he needs help with.
- < Just sit and listen to someone. The best listeners are those who don't fix the problem or judge, but just listen.
- < Help a child with his or her homework.
- < Make something personal to give to someone: a meal, a poem, or a picture are great gifts.

How others have done it

"I heard about the social activities at the HIV service center near my house, but I never went. I finally tried one of their get-togethers and had a really good time. Now I go all the time."

"I wanted to meet other people with HIV, so I'm gonna volunteer at one of the AIDS organizations. That way I'll meet people and help others."

"I was always uptight when I went to see the doctor. I once got up the nerve to ask her about her hobbies and interests and found out that the two of us have a lot in common."

"I don't like to talk about sex. It's embarrassing. But one time my nurse practitioner and I talked about my sex life, and he accepted me just the way I am."

"I learned a lot about my new friend by really listening to him."

"My friend and I get together once a week and go for a long walk. We talk all about our problems and our lives. By the time we're done, I feel really good-- you know like a weight's been lifted off my shoulders."

Q: What if my sex partner refuses to use a condom?

A: Let your partner know your feelings for him or her. Talk about the risks for both of you.

A: Show your partner how using condoms can be a sensual addition to your lovemaking. Condoms come in a variety of colors, flavors and textures. Find some that both you and your partner enjoy.

A: Enjoy sex in ways that do not involve sexual intercourse, like hugging, flirting, kissing, caressing, and sexual stimulation of you and your partner without the exchange of body fluids.

A: You may want to choose someone else if your sex partner won't honor your wishes to protect both of you from the risks.

"I won't have sex without a condom - I would be too worried the whole time - it's a rule - I don't rethink it with a new sex partner - I just tell them it's my rule."

"I use a condom - even if my sex partner doesn't want to. I don't allow myself to get confused by any arguments about reasons to not use a condom and I don't worry about why a partner thinks we don't need it. I just tell him, 'no condom - no sex'."

"I tell him I'm positive and we are using a condom - that's it - no choice."

"I had a hard time persuading my partner to use a condom - he thinks he can't get infected just because he hasn't gotten infected yet. I tell him it's too big a chance to take. He really doesn't realize how difficult this disease can be to live with. So I have to do the thinking for him on this decision. I don't want to be the cause of him getting HIV."

"I use protection always - so I don't get vaginal infections that are really difficult for me to get rid of. I insist on it. If he doesn't want to use a condom then I tell him we don't have sex."

"I have a negative partner and he won't use a condom - even though he knows I have HIV. He gets angry - my social worker said she would talk to him - it took him a long time to go talk with her but she really helped to talk some sense into him, and helped him to understand the consequences."

SITUATIONS THAT MAY LEAD TO UNSAFE SEX

If you always use protection or are abstinent, most of this information won't apply to you.

But if you have had unsafe sex recently, it's important to think about why that happened.

Are there situations or people that make it harder for you to have safer sex or to not have sex at all?

If you don't figure out which situations are hard for you, you may end up doing things that are bad for your health.

Some common things to WATCH OUT for if you have had unsafe sex recently:

Things to watch out for

Alcohol and other drugs

Strong feelings

Why they're a problem

Alcohol or other drugs may affect your judgment and may lead you to have unsafe sex.

Strong feelings like anger, depression, frustration, loneliness, rejection, feeling horny, or just being in a bad mood may lead you to have unsafe sex.

What you can do

Avoid using alcohol or other drugs when you have sex. Get professional help or join a group like AA or NA if this is an ongoing problem.

Talk to a therapist, join a support group, exercise, or talk to a close friend.

What some people say

"I know that when I'm high I have unsafe sex, and I don't think about protecting myself or my sex partner."

"When I start feeling lonely or down I try to make plans to see friends. Otherwise I end up looking for sex to feel better."

What you can do

Things to watch out for

Why they're a problem

What some people say

Party places

Places like bars, dance clubs and bathhouses can be a problem because people often have unsafe sex there with people they don't know.

Avoid places where you have sex with people you don't know. Having sex with strangers without condoms puts you at risk for unsafe sex and STDs.

"It's real hard for me to have safer sex when I pick someone up at a bar—so I don't go to bars as much as I used to."

People you've just met who are really sexy

You may find it harder to talk about your HIV status or to have safer sex with sexy people you've just met.

Take your time to really get to know someone well before you decide if you want to have sex with him or her. If you don't know your partner, it may be harder to talk about your HIV status and to have safer sex.

"I used to have sex right away—especially with new, hot looking people; and I never used condoms. Then I got herpes. Now I use condoms and get to know the person before I have sex with him."

What are other things that lead you to have unsafe sex? Take a little time to think this over and come up with a plan. Find someone who can help you, like a friend, family member, or professional.

You don't have to give up having fun—just find safe ways to have sex.

What can I do to help stop the epidemic?

Many people who have a serious illness find they want to help others with the same illness. Many want to keep other people from getting it. If you have an interest in helping others, there are many ways you can help. We have a few suggestions that might be a good place to start.

Some things that you can do are very personal and some are very public. You will need to decide what is right for you.

CHECK YOUR OWN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Feel good about yourself and what you have to offer to others.

Take good care of your health.

Eat right, sleep enough, exercise regularly, and take your medications.

Practice safer sex and tell your partners you have HIV.

Protect your partners and protect yourself.

BECOME INFORMED

Learn how HIV is transmitted and how it is not transmitted.

Learn about the medical treatments for HIV and how these work.

Learn about the national and the international epidemic.

EDUCATE OTHERS

Join a speakers' bureau.

Talk to teenagers, young adults, your friends and your family about this information.

Don't let misinformation go uncorrected.

Be willing to tell others about the epidemic and to keep it in the media.

Check to see that your local schools have an HIV education program.

Visit a school or college and share your experience with students.

VOLUNTEER

Help with fund raising events for an HIV service organization.

Help to plan, register, manage or clean up after an AIDS event.

Drive others to appointments, to the grocery store, to church, and to meetings.

Help with phone outreach, food and meal delivery, and special services like hair cutting for those who cannot go out easily.

If you speak another language, volunteer as a translator.

ADVOCATE

Ask what your elected representatives are doing to fight HIV/AIDS.

Encourage your local newspaper to run responsible stories that educate about HIV/AIDS.

Remember to speak for those in developing countries who cannot make their needs know.

Demand that our best research scientists be supported to work on a vaccine.

DONATE

Your time. Your resources. Your talent.

The slogan of Partnership for Health is:

"The action of one. The partnership of two. The power of many."

HIV/AIDS action starts at home. It starts with you, with your family, and with your community.
You can make a difference.

