health information sheet

Safer Sex

Safer sex is sexual activity that lowers the chances of unintended pregnancy and getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Safer sex is consensual, which means that all partners agree to participate and understand what they're agreeing to. Consent is voluntary and can be taken back if a person changes their mind. Consent is needed each time and for every type of sexual activity. It's important for all partners to talk with one another about consent and safer sex.

What types of sex are safer?

Being informed about risks is part of safer sex. There are different kinds of sexual activities, and each sexual activity has a different level of risk for pregnancy and STIs.

Hand sex

- When a person's hand is on or inside another person's genitals or anus. Also called *handjobs*, *fisting*, or *fingering*.
- There is no risk for pregnancy with hand sex.
- Some STIs could be passed through hand sex.

Oral sex

- When a person's mouth is on another person's genitals or anus. Also called *going down* or *eating out* (on a vulva), *blowjobs* or *giving head* (on a penis), *rim job* or *rimming* (on an anus).
- There is no risk for pregnancy with oral sex.
- STIs can be passed through oral sex.

Vaginal sex

- When a person's penis is in another person's vagina.
- There is a high risk for pregnancy with vaginal sex.
- STIs can be passed through vaginal sex.

Anal sex

- When a person's penis is in another person's anus.
- Pregnancy is possible with anal sex if semen is near the vaginal area.
- STIs can be passed through anal sex.

Pregnancy can happen with any activity where a penis or semen are near a vagina or vaginal area of a person who can become pregnant. This includes vaginal sex, anal sex, or penis and vaginal touching.

STIs can be passed between partners with any activity that involves sexual contact between one person's body and another person's genitals, anus, semen, blood, or vaginal fluid. This includes hand sex, oral sex, vaginal sex, and anal sex.

It is not possible to get pregnant from kissing, massage, or masturbating alone or in front of a partner. These are not risky activities for STIs.

Alberta Health Services

How can I have safer sex?

- Make sure that consent is part of all sexual activities. Use clear communication with your partner(s) to talk about what you like, limits, and safer sex.
- Talk with your partner(s) about your sexual health history, and the last time you were tested for STIs. Ask them about any STIs they've had, when they were last tested, and if they've had any other sexual partners since then.
- Use water-based lubricants. Lube can help make sex more comfortable. It also prevents genital irritation and lowers the chance of condoms breaking.
- Consider how alcohol, cannabis and other drugs can affect how you make decisions about sex, and plan ahead for safer sex.

To lower the chance of **pregnancy**:

- Choose sexual activities that cannot lead to pregnancy, like masturbation or oral sex.
- Use a condom as well as another method of birth control (dual protection). This improves how well the birth control works and lowers the risk for STIs.
- Think about getting emergency contraception as soon as possible if your condom breaks or sperm gets near the genitals of a person who could become pregnant.

To lower the chance of **STIs**:

- Limit your number of sexual partners.
- Use safer sex barriers, like internal condoms, external condoms, and dental dams.
- Get tested for STIs with each new partner or yearly, even if you don't have any symptoms.
- Get immunized against hepatitis B and human papillomavirus (HPV).
- Use an HIV prevention medication, called PrEP, if you're at high risk for HIV.
- Don't share sex toys. If you do share them, wash them according to manufacturer's instructions or use condoms with them.

Websites

- ahs.ca/srh
- myhealth.alberta.ca
- prepalberta.ca

- ReadyOrNotAlberta.ca
- sexandu.ca

- TeachingSexualHealth.ca
- Help after sexual assault: aasas.ca

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at **811**.

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