



safer SEX

FOR Bisexuals
AND THEIR
Partners



FENWAY COMMUNITY HEALTH

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MANY BISEXUALS ALREADY HAVE SAFER SEX

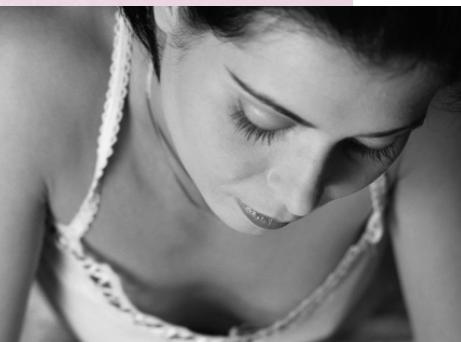
to protect themselves and their partners from unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. If you already practice safer sex, you can use this brochure to teach a friend. It talks about some of the ways you can reduce your risk of getting HIV or STDs. If you already have HIV or an STD, safer sex can help you avoid passing it to a sex partner. It is also important to protect your own health by avoiding other infections.

It's Not Who You Are

Safer sex is about what you do. It is not about who you are. HIV is spread through blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. For some STDs, like Herpes, skin-to-skin contact can pass them from one person to another. Using condoms, dental dams, and other safer sex supplies greatly reduces the chances of getting or passing on HIV and other STDs.

THINKING ABOUT RISK

Some people do not have sex with anyone because they are worried about HIV and other STDs. Other people do not worry at all and take a lot of risks. Most people try to find a good balance. They know sex can be wonderful, and that sex is more fun if you are not afraid. But they also know that HIV and other STDs are real. They make an effort to protect themselves. Finding a good balance means thinking about what risks you are willing to take and which ones you do not want to take. Your own "risk limits" can change over time as you learn new things or as your own needs and wishes change.



The risk of getting an STD is like other risks in life, such as driving a car. Some people might choose never to ride in a car because they are afraid of getting into a car accident. But most people accept the risks and find ways to reduce them. You know that you can wear your seat belt to reduce the chances that you'll die if you get into an accident. Cars have safety supplies you can use, like seatbelts, that make it safer to ride in a car. Condoms, dental dams, and other supplies make sex safer.

DECIDE YOUR RISK LIMITS

One way to think about risk is to write down on a piece of paper (or think through in your head) what sexual activities you are comfortable with and consider safe for yourself. For many people, these include things like kissing, hugging, or bringing pleasure to a partner with your hands. Some people might also include having oral, anal, or vaginal sex with a condom or dental dam. Then make a list of the things you are not comfortable with or think are too risky. There may be some activities that you may feel comfortable with part of the time, as well as activities that you are not certain how you feel about. Writing these things down gives you a visual idea of what you consider too risky or not risky, and helps you to think through in advance what you would do in a sexual situation.

Once you have a good idea of what your own risk limits are, you can work to avoid engaging in sexual activities that fall outside of your risk limits. Most people do not want to put themselves at risk for HIV and other STDs. At times, mistakes happen. One thing leads to another, and you find yourself having a sexual experience that you later worry about. Thinking in advance about what you are and are not comfortable with can help to avoid this.

Talking with a safer sex counselor is one way to sort things out. It can help you figure out ways to avoid doing risky things in the future. If you have thought things through, it can be easier to know what to do "in the heat of the moment." At the end of this brochure is a listing of bisexual-supportive safer sex resources where you can get information and help.

Know The Tools

CONDOMS

Condoms greatly reduce the risk of getting or passing on many STDs, including HIV. Condoms come in many shapes and sizes. You might like to try out different kinds to see which ones feel best to you. The outside of the condom package will say whether it is lubricated or non-lubricated. The lubricated ones can make anal and vaginal sex easier and more pleasurable. Non-lubricated or flavored condoms can be used when pleasuring a penis with a mouth.



Most condoms are made out of latex, a kind of rubber. Some people are allergic to latex. They can use polyurethane condoms. Avoid lambskin condoms because they do not stop HIV from passing through. Check the date on the condom wrapper to be sure it has not expired.



Reality® brand condoms are condoms that you put into the vagina or anus before sex. Sometimes they are called “female condoms,” but they can be used by men for anal sex, too. Some people think Reality condoms feel better or are easier to use. Others prefer regular condoms. You and your partner(s) can decide what's best for you.

Use a new condom with each sex act and each partner.

DENTAL DAMS AND PLASTIC WRAP

You can use dental dams and plastic food wrap when using your mouth to pleasure a vagina, vulva or anus. They prevent the spread of HIV and other STDs. Dental dams are square pieces of stretchy plastic used by dentists. Several companies now make thinner and lighter dams created just for sex. You can also cut a condom into a flat square and use it the same way or use a large piece of plastic food wrap.



LUBE

When putting a penis, fingers, or a sex toy inside a vagina or anus, using lots of water-based lubricant can greatly reduce friction, make sex more pleasurable, and help prevent a condom from breaking.



GLOVES AND FINGER COTS

When putting fingers inside an anus or vagina, you can use latex gloves or finger cots (sleeves for individual fingers). They reduce the risk of getting a germ or virus through tiny cuts on your hand.

Keep Your Tools Nearby

Having condoms, dental dams, gloves, lube and other safer sex supplies nearby makes it easier to grab them and use them during sex. Anywhere you might be having sex, bring the supplies along with you. That could mean keeping a supply within arm's reach of your bed, in your backpack, or purse.

COMMUNICATION

Talk, talk, talk. People who talk with their partner or partners about safer sex find it easier to have safer sex. Many of us were taught when we were very young that sex is shameful and dirty and should not be talked about. Those early messages can make it hard to talk openly about safer sex today. But comfort does come with time and practice. Talking with a partner is a chance to learn what they do to practice safer sex, what turns them on, and what sexual things you might enjoy doing together.



HONESTY AND TRUST

Some people want to have one partner and be monogamous. Others want to have more than one partner. Talking openly with your partner(s) about what you want builds honesty and trust in your relationship. Some people in long-term relationships explore the possibilities of having sex without condoms or other barriers. One term for this is “negotiated safety.” It means coming to a clear agreement about sex inside and outside your relationship so that you will not infect each other with HIV or other STDs. Talking about your hopes and your fears helps build trust and protect you and your partner.

Know Yourself

Sometimes it is harder to have safer sex. What those times are varies from person to person, and you probably know what they are for you. For some people, using alcohol or drugs before or during sex can make it harder to have safer sex. Other people find that some places, events, or partners are challenging for safer sex. Others feel like their partner might hurt them if they asked for safer sex. If you sometimes have sexual experiences that feel out of control, you can get support at the agencies listed at the end of this brochure.

YOU DECIDE

Just as seat belts cannot guarantee you will not be injured in a car accident, using condoms, dental dams and other barriers is also not a 100% guarantee. Some STDs, such as the human papillomavirus (HPV) and herpes, can be spread through skin-to-skin contact. For example, a man might have herpes at the base of his penis or on his testicles, two areas that may not be covered by a condom. In addition to using condoms and dental dams, some people choose to have no sexual partners (be abstinent), have very few sexual partners, or have only one partner who is monogamous with them.



TESTING AND TREATMENT

Many STDs are treatable and even curable. Even for STDs like herpes and genital warts which are not curable, medicines can often help. Treatment can help people with HIV live longer and healthier. Syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia can be cured with antibiotics. Antibiotics cannot reverse any harm already done, so early detection and treatment is very important. You can prevent Hepatitis A and B by getting vaccinated for them. For more information on STDs or where to be vaccinated and treated, see the list below.



Finally, and most importantly, SEX IS FUN

Part of feeling good about safer sex is feeling good about sex and ourselves. Enjoy!

Resources

BiHealth Program at Fenway Community Health
7 Haviland St., Boston, MA 02115
617-927-6032
bihealth@fenwayhealth.org
www.fenwayhealth.org

Bisexual Resource Center
P.O. Box 1026
Boston, MA 02117
617-424-9595
brc@biresource.org
www.biresource.org

**Playing Safe With Both Teams:
Bisexuality and HIV Prevention**
www.biresource.org/bothteams

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National STD and AIDS Hotline
800-342-2437
www.ashastd.org

