Many Bisexuals Already Have Safer Sex

to protect themselves and their partners from unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Use this brochure to learn how to reduce your risk of getting or passing on HIV and other STIs. If you already practice safer sex, you can use this brochure to teach a friend.

It's Not About Who You Are

Safer sex is about what you do. HIV is spread through blood, semen (cum), vaginal fluids, and breast milk. Some STIs, like herpes, can pass from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact between the penis or vagina, anus, and mouth. This can include areas not covered by a condom, like the balls.

Ways You Can Lower Your Risks

• Use condoms, latex dams and gloves
• Choose safer sex acts instead of riskier ones
• Use only new or clean needles and drug tools, and don’t share
• Be open with your doctor about your risks
• Ask your doctor about STI vaccines
• Get tested for HIV & STIs regularly, because some STIs show few or no symptoms.

Why Have Safer Sex?

Sex is more fun if you’re not afraid.

Many people do not have sex with anyone because they are worried about HIV & STIs. Other people do not worry and take a lot of risks. Most people try to find a good balance. You can find your own balance by thinking about which risks you are willing to take and which you are not. These are called your “risk limits.” Your own risk limits can change over time as you learn new things or as your own needs and wishes change.

Resources

One of the best things you can do to help reduce your risk of HIV and other STIs is to talk to your partner(s) and make sure you both understand the risks and how to protect yourselves. This may be easier than you think. You don’t need to sit down and have a long, formal conversation about sex. Just sit down and have a good talk. It’s one way to figure out in advance what you would feel comfortable doing in a sexual situation.

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Do you practice safer sex? You might have heard the term “safer sex.” This means keeping your sexual health in mind when you have sex. This means different things for different people. One thing leads to another, and you find yourself having a sexual encounter that you later worry about. If this happens, there are many resources you can use to get help. 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 “in the heat of the moment.” If you were sexually abused or assaulted, speaking to a rape crisis counselor or hotline can help. Look at the end of this brochure for a list of resources.

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Know the Tools

Condoms

Condoms greatly reduce the risk of getting or passing on HIV and other STIs. Latex barriers, sometimes called “dental dams,” offer an additional layer of protection. Condoms come in all shapes and sizes. There are even tailor-made condoms, like the balls.

Keeping Your Tools Nearby

If you have condoms, latex dams, gloves, lube, and other safer sex supplies nearby, they’re easier to grab when you need them. You can keep these supplies handy in your own rooms, or in a shared space. If you’re not sure what’s available, ask your partner(s) what they use.

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Just What Are STIs, Anyway? Many STIs can be treated or cured, but you can become re-infected with most STIs if you have sex with an infected person again. Which ones can you get again? Bacterial STIs, like gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis, and also yeast infections. Some STIs cannot be cured, but have treatments that can help symptoms. These STIs include many viral ones, like HIV, herpes and HPV.

Getting the Right Tests
If you have oral or anal sex without a condom and want to get tested for STIs, it’s important to ask your doctor about swabbing your throat and/or anus for gonorrhea and chlamydia, since a pee-in-a-cup test can’t detect these. For genital areas, you should tell your doctor about any sores or ulcers, and if you had any tender lymph nodes.

Sex with Penetration

The risk of getting HIV is higher for the person being penetrated (in anal sex, the “bottom”) than for the person doing the penetrating (in anal sex, the “top”). Both people are at risk for getting or giving STIs. Sharing sex toys can also put people at risk for HIV and STIs.

Known Risks: HIV, gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, herpes I and II, HPV, hepatitis B, chlamydial (vaginal sex only)
Unknown Risks: hepatitis C (higher if there is blood or microtrauma)

Safer Sex Tips:
- Use a condom and some lube. Lube helps condoms not break and makes sex feel better.
- Don’t use the condom if it’s too old. You can tell by the expiration date on the wrapper.
- Adding a drop of lube inside the tip of the condom can make it feel good. After you put on the condom, lube up the outside, too.
- Pinch the tip of the condom as you put it on.
- This will leave room for cum so the condom won’t burst when the person cum (spermatized).
- When you put it on the condom, make sure the side is up that will roll down smoothly. If you put it on wrong side up, don’t flip it over, try again with a new condom.
- Hold onto the base of the condom as you pull the penis out so the cum doesn’t spill and the condom doesn’t come off inside the partner.
- Use a new condom with each sex act and each partner.
- If you insert toys for sex, use condoms on your toys, clean them with bleach and water, or don’t share them. Leather toys can’t be cleaned like this, so don’t share those. Don’t have bleach? Washing with soap and water can still help.

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VAGINAL AND ANAL SEX - WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Condoms

Condoms used right can protect you from many STIs and can prevent pregnancy. Condoms WON’T completely protect you from STIs that are spread by skin-to-skin contact, like herpes, HPV and syphilis, which could be passed from a genital area not covered by a condom, like the balls, base of the penis, or the skin of the vulva around the vagina.

Post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP, is a series of medicine you could take if you’ve been exposed to HIV to lower your risk of getting it. The medicine will not protect you if you get exposed to HIV a lot. Timing is important! You have to start the medicine within 72 hours after getting exposed, so get medical help right away! Many emergency rooms offer PEP. For more info, see the resources at the end of this brochure.

Needles & Drug Tools - What Are The Risks?

Not all HIV or Hepatitis risks are sexual. Sharing needles and syringes—whether for drugs, tattoos, hormones, steroids, or anything else—can put you at risk for HIV and Hepatitis B & C. Sharing other drug works such as cottons, cookers, and rinse water, can also put you at risk. If you share nasal bumpers or straws to snort drugs it can put you at risk for Hepatitis B & C.

Safety Tips:
- Don’t use your own if possible.
- Many states have needle exchange programs, where you can exchange used needles for clean ones for FREE. In some states (including Massachusetts), drug stores sell sterile syringes over the counter.
- If you share, clean your needle and syringe before you use them by drawing in, shaking, and then rinsing with water 5 times, then bleach 3 times, then finally water 3 times again. Each time you draw in water or bleach, shake the needle for a minute before squirting the liquid out.
- Anything you do to clean your needle and syringe is better than not cleaning at all, but don’t use dirty water since it could give you an infection.
- If you want support for reducing your drug use, see the resources at the end of this brochure.