

What are my chances of getting HIV?

Are you at risk?

Condoms and other barriers are the best way to reduce your risk of getting HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS. Everyone knows that. But not everyone protects themselves or their partners – they take a chance and hope that they won't get HIV. However, the risks of getting HIV are greater for some people than for others.

Your risk of getting HIV depends on:

1. *how much of the virus you were exposed to*

When a person has HIV, most of the virus is in their blood, semen and vaginal fluids. That is why some sexual activities are more dangerous than others.

2. *how long you were exposed to HIV*

Your risk is increased if you **receive** semen in the vagina or anus.

3. *how healthy your mucous membranes are*

Mucous membranes are the lining of the moist areas leading into and out of your body:

Mucous membranes

- **the urethra** – the tube that urine passes through
- **the cervix** – the opening to the uterus (womb)
- **the vagina**
- **the anus and the rectum** (inside the bum)
- **the mouth and throat**

If your mucous membranes are not healthy, your risk of getting HIV goes up.

Your mucous membranes can become irritated or infected:

- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, and herpes can irritate *any* of the mucous membranes.
- Infections like trichomonas, yeast or bacterial vaginosis (BV) irritate the *vagina*.
- Vigorous sex can irritate the *vagina* or *anus*, especially when they are dry.
- Enemas can irritate the *anus*.
- Douching can irritate the *vagina*.
- Smoking tobacco or using crack cocaine irritates the *mouth and throat*.

When mucous membranes are inflamed or irritated, it is easier for HIV to get into your blood, even if you don't have a cut. Of course, your best protection is to use condoms, especially for vaginal and anal sex, to help prevent the transmission of HIV and other STIs.

Reduce your risk

- Avoid using spermicide.
- Women should not douche.
- Avoid using enemas before anal sex.
- Do not share sex toys.
- Use condoms with a water-based lubricant for vaginal or anal sex.
- Use condoms for oral sex on a man; use a latex barrier for oral sex on a woman.

See a doctor if you have:

- unusual discharge from your penis or vagina
- irritation, itching or sores on your penis, vagina, buttocks, rectum, mouth or throat
- burning when you urinate

Because it is possible to have an STI and not know it, your best protection is to use condoms every time. If you want to stop using condoms with your partner, call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline or visit a clinic to talk about it.

If you have had unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex, get tested.

Untreated STIs greatly increase your risk of getting HIV from a person who has it.

Oral sex

It is less common to get HIV from unprotected oral sex. However, there are situations that make it easier to get HIV from oral sex such as:

- an untreated syphilis sore (chancere) or herpes
 - If a person has HIV and also has a sore on or inside the mouth, or on the genitals, it makes it easier to *give* HIV through oral sex. If a person has a sore, it is easier to *get* HIV this way.
- unprotected oral sex on a woman when she has her period
- brushing, flossing or dental work just before oral sex

For more information on STIs, HIV/AIDS, or the location of a Sexual Health Clinic near you, call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at

416-392-2437.

www.toronto.ca/health