

ABOUT HIV

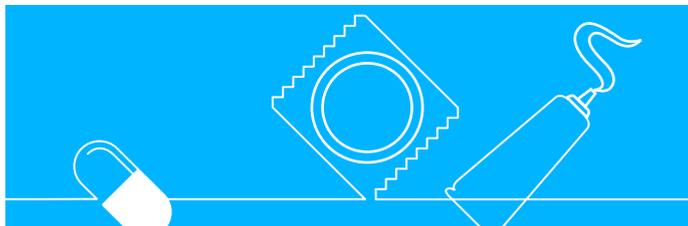
HIV and sex

Having HIV can affect people's feelings about sex in many different ways.

Some people become anxious about passing HIV on, or feel less desirable. While some people go off sex altogether, others look for it more and more. It may seem more important than ever to feel wanted or to have moments of intimacy and pleasure.

It's worth knowing that:

- Most people living with HIV do continue to have sex and form relationships.
- People living with HIV can have children who don't have HIV.
- If your HIV treatment is fully effective, it's unlikely that you will pass HIV on to a sexual partner.
- If you use condoms, it's unlikely that you will pass HIV on to a sexual partner.



Your sexual health

Condoms are important for your health too – they will protect you from sexually transmitted infections. Some infections, like syphilis and hepatitis C, can be more difficult to treat when you have HIV. If you ask, your clinic can provide a regular sexual health check-up.

When choosing a contraceptive method, HIV treatments may need to be considered. Some anti-HIV drugs can interact with the pill and other hormonal contraceptives.

Transmission facts

Anal and vaginal sex are the most common ways that HIV is passed on.

The risk of transmitting HIV during other sexual activities is much, much lower. There's more information on these below.

If condoms are used during anal or vaginal sex, HIV transmission is highly unlikely. Condoms prevent body fluids containing HIV from passing from one person to another. Using a water- or silicone-based lubricant makes condoms even safer.

Similarly, if you are taking HIV treatment and have an 'undetectable' viral load, then it's highly unlikely that you'll pass HIV on during sex. When a person's viral load is 'undetectable', this means that there is only a tiny amount of HIV in the body.

The risk of HIV transmission will be extremely low if all of the following apply:

- Blood tests show that your viral load has been undetectable for several months.
- You take the right amount of your anti-HIV drugs at the right times.
- You do not have any sexually transmitted infections.
- Your partner does not have any sexually transmitted infections.

Research shows that HIV treatment reduces the risk of passing HIV on to a regular partner by 96%.

Your doctor can give you – and your partner – more detailed advice, based on your circumstances.

Low risk and no risk

Compared to unprotected anal or vaginal sex, the risk of passing HIV on during other sexual activities is much, much lower.

Oral sex is considered to be low risk. If you are a man living with HIV, there's a small possibility of transmission if you have a high viral load and you ejaculate in somebody's mouth. If you are a woman living with HIV, there's virtually no risk of passing HIV on during oral sex.

There's also virtually no risk of transmission during mutual masturbation (rubbing each other's penis, vagina or anus). It's impossible for HIV to be passed on through kissing, cuddling or stroking.

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A collaboration between: NAM aidsmap, European AIDS Treatment Group, Aids Action Europe, East Europe & Central Asia Union of PLWH and ITPCru (The Treatment Preparedness Coalition).

For more information: www.about-hiv.info; www.pro-vich.info; www.aidsmap.com

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Also, there is no risk during normal social contact. No-one has ever picked up HIV from:

- sharing household items like cups, plates or cutlery,
- using the same toilet, or
- breathing the same air as someone with HIV.



PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)

If you're worried that you might have just exposed someone to HIV (for example, if you had sex without a condom, or if a condom broke), an emergency treatment called PEP may be available.

PEP is a course of anti-HIV drugs that must be started very soon after the risk has been taken – the sooner the better and definitely within 72 hours (three days). It can prevent HIV being passed on.

PEP may be available from HIV clinics and hospital emergency departments.

HIV and the law

In some countries, some people have gone to prison for passing HIV on to another person, or for having sex without a condom. The situation depends on the law of each country. There's more information about this in the fact sheet on HIV and human rights.

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