

Healthy sex and sexuality is about being able to express your sexual self, your sexual identity and your sexual preferences. Healthy sexuality can encompass the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of our self. When sexually relating to others, practicing safer sex can help maintain and increase our ability to stay as healthy as possible.

Safer sex is about being informed, educated and aware of the ways in which sex and sex play can be made less risky. Safer sex is also about behaviour and personal choices. There are many options for practicing safer sex; the key is in knowing your options, resources and which practices work best for you and your sexual relationships.

## WHAT ARE MY SAFER SEX OPTIONS?

It is important to remember that saliva, tears and sweat are NOT fluids that put you at risk for HIV infection; but blood, pre-cum, cum and female vaginal fluids DO put you at risk for HIV infection. Also, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, do not always produce symptoms. The only way to know your STI and HIV status is to get tested. Knowing your sexual health status helps to protect yourself and your partner(s) from infections.

### The male condom:

The male condom can be used for vaginal, anal and oral sex. To reduce the risk of HIV and STI transmission, condoms need to be used consistently and correctly. Most male condoms are latex and are available lubricated or non-lubricated. Things to remember about male condoms:

- ▶ Coloured condoms are only safe for oral sex
- ▶ Water-based lubricants are always recommended
- ▶ Lambskin condoms do not protect against HIV and STIs
- ▶ Condoms can be used as protection when sharing sex toys

### The Female Condom™:

The Female Condom™ can be used for vaginal, anal and oral sex. It is a safer sex option that can be inserted several hours before sex takes place. The Female Condom™ is made of polyurethane making it user friendly for people with latex

allergies and sensitivities. It is not widely available in pharmacies or drug stores but can be found at certain community sexual health clinics and/or community organizations free of charge.

### Water-based lubricants:

Personal lubricants can be used for vaginal, anal and oral sex. Using water-based lubricants can reduce friction during sex and minimize tiny rips and tears in the lining of the vagina and the anus. Damage to the internal linings of the vagina and anus can increase the risk of HIV and STI infection. Remember to only use water-based lubricants as oil-based lubes such as lotion, Vaseline and massage oil, can damage latex.

### Dental dams:

A dental dam is a barrier method that can reduce the risk of HIV and STI infection during mouth-to-vagina or mouth-to-anus contact. Dams can be difficult to find in local pharmacies but using a piece of non-microwaveable cling wrap will work. Dental dams can also be made by cutting down the length of a non-lubed/lubed male condom so it becomes a latex sheathe.

### Latex gloves:

Latex gloves are part of safer sex and can be used for vaginal or anal penetration with fingers or hands. Sharp fingernails can damage the lining of the vagina and anus; gloves can help to prevent this. Gloves can also reduce the risk of STI infection through open cuts and sores on hands. If hands are unwashed before digital sex, using gloves can protect against bacteria entering body cavities and causing irritation.

## WHAT BODY AREAS ARE MOST SENSITIVE TO INFECTION?

Mouth and Throat: Compared to intercourse, oral sex is considered a 'low' risk sexual activity. There is still some risk of catching STIs through unprotected oral sex. Reduce your risk by not brushing your teeth or using mouthwash before oral sex. Doing so can create tiny cuts around your mouth and gums creating a potential route for infection. The best way to keep your mouth and throat safe is to use condoms for oral sex; flavored condoms can be an exciting option.

**Vagina and Cervix:** The cervix, located at the top of the vagina near the uterus is a delicate spot. It is protected by only a single layer of fragile cells, creating an ideal location for HIV and other STIs to enter the body. The rest of the vagina is also lined with a delicate layer of tissue. By using a condom and water-based lubricant during vaginal sex, the vagina can be protected from potential rips, tears and infections.

**Penis:** The foreskin and the urethra (opening at the tip of the penis) are two points on the penis through which STIs and HIV can enter the body. The penis is also a sensitive area prone to friction and delicate tissue damage. Covering the penis with a condom can help to reduce fine damage to the penis. A condom also limits the exchange of body fluids between partners.

**Anus:** The anus, much like the vagina, has a very delicate lining and is made up of membranes that sexually transmitted infections can pass through. Using condoms, gloves and/or water-based lubes for anal penetration helps to protect the lining of the anus from damage. These safer sex options can also provide increased comfort.

**Consider STI/HIV testing as part of an annual health check up or routine. Free and confidential HIV and STI testing is available in Vancouver at:**

**BCCDC Clinic**  
655 West 12<sup>th</sup> Ave  
t: 604-660-6161

**Pine Free Clinic**  
1985 West 4th Avenue  
t: 604-736-2391

**Three Bridges Community Health**  
1292 Hornby Street  
t: 604-736-9844

**Downtown Community Health**  
569 Powell Street  
t: 604-255-3151

**Pender Community Health**  
59 West Pender  
t: 604-669-9181

**Bute Street Clinic**  
1170 Bute Street  
t: 604-660-7949

**North Community Health**  
200-1651 Commercial Drive  
t: 604-253-3575

For other clinic locations, check AIDS Vancouver's website at [www.aidsvancouver.org](http://www.aidsvancouver.org)

## HOW TO USE A MALE CONDOM RIGHT?

Using a condom correctly and consistently can substantially reduce the risk of HIV infection.

### Steps for correct condom use:

1. Check the expiration date on the condom wrapper. If it has not passed, carefully tear open the package along the edge and take the condom out. Do not use your teeth or scissors as they may puncture the condom. Remember - condoms should be kept in a cool dry place.
2. Make sure that you have positioned the condom the right way up so that you will be able to unroll it properly. If you accidentally position it the wrong way, dispose of the condom and use a new one.
3. When the penis is hard, squeeze the air out of the tip of the condom between your thumb and forefinger and place it on the head of the penis.
4. Holding the tip of the condom, roll it down over the erect penis using your other hand. Roll the condom all the way to the base, smoothing out any air bubbles along the way. Remember - if uncircumcised, pull the foreskin back before unrolling the condom down over the penis.
5. It is advisable to use some water-based lubricant on the inside and outside of the condom. Make sure you do not use oil-based lubricants such as Vaseline, body lotions and vegetable oil as these items will damage the condom and cause it to break during sex.
6. After ejaculation, hold onto the base of the condom while pulling out slowly.
7. Dispose of the condom properly and never use a condom more than once.