

BOYFRIEND

**"You're an educator.
You should know. Is it safe?"**

Not an uncommon statement hurled at health educators and one that can elicit a sinking feeling of inadequacy in the most hardy of outreach workers.

What are these questions usually about?

ORAL SEX AND HIV TRANSMISSION

So what is the low down on going down?

Well, there have been a relatively small number of documented cases confirming HIV transmission can occur during oral sex.

There is not enough evidence to specify the exact risk of HIV transmission through one episode of oral sex. Though given the relatively high number of HIV transmissions through anal sex we conclude that oral sex without condoms is a much smaller risk than anal sex without condoms.

We know from the case reports involving HIV transmission during oral sex that particular circumstances increase the risk of HIV transmission.

We know that:

Transmission usually occurs:

- .. From the receiver of the oral sex to the person going down.
- .. If the receiver already has HIV and has a high viral load.
- .. When ejaculation into the mouth has occurred.
- .. If the person giving the oral has a breach or break in the lining of the mouth.

(The HIV virus needs to enter your blood stream to be transmitted.)

There are a number of things that may cause an HIV entry point in your mouth:

- .. Brushing or flossing teeth within two hours of having oral sex without condoms or dams.
- .. Having cuts/sores in your mouth.
- .. Dental disease, including gingivitis, ulcers or oral herpes.
- .. Piercing.
- .. Eating abrasive or spicy foods.
- .. Rough or vigorous oral sex.
- .. Recent dental treatment.
- .. Certain drugs (e.g. speed).



There are things you can do to reduce the breaches or breaks in the lining of the mouth before going down;

- .. Avoid oral sex without condoms if you've eaten in the last couple of hours.
- .. Do not brush or floss your teeth two hours beforehand.
- .. Avoid oral sex if you have infections in and around the mouth or have had any recent dental work.
- .. Have regular check-ups -- dental and sexual health screens.
- .. Gargle salty water -- if it stings, than you have a potential HIV entry point and there is potentially a cut in your mouth.

Lets face reality. The incidence of condom use during oral sex amongst men who have sex with men is relatively small. This makes is particularly difficult for workers to insist on their use. Plenty of workers have reported the loss of clients at the first mention of oral sex with condoms.

Using condoms is the best practice in a sexual health sense. Using flavoured condoms and learning how to put them on with your mouth may introduce a novelty value to there use. However if condoms are not used, you can still reduce the risk by following the principles as outlined above.

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