

Safer Sex Guidelines at a Glance

Note: this section is based on the Canadian AIDS Society HIV Transmission: Guidelines for Assessing Risk (2005). It is intended for use by counsellors; NOT as a handout for clients.

To help clients assess the risk of their sexual activities, counsellors should understand how transmission of HIV occurs. Risk reduction and prevention are important for all clients, regardless of whether they test positive or negative. Clients who test positive will want to know how to continue to enjoy sex and intimacy while avoiding passing HIV to their sexual partners. Clients who test negative will use information about risk to help develop strategies to stay negative.

Counsellors who maintain an open, positive attitude about the infinite variety of sexual activities will find it easier to discuss a client's risk behaviours and options. Having consistent and accurate information on hand can help clients make choices that are right for them.

Conditions of HIV Transmission

The science is clear: HIV transmission can occur when there is a sufficient level of virus in blood, semen or vaginal fluids to enter the bloodstream of a sexual partner, usually through small breaks or tears in the vagina, anus, mouth or skin. Unprotected vaginal and anal intercourse and sharing insertive sex toys that have not been cleaned/disinfected represent the highest risk of sexual transmission of HIV. Other sexual activities represent lower levels of risk.

Categories of Risk

Sexual activities can be classified into the following categories of risk for HIV transmission, based on scientific evidence:

- **High risk:** High potential of transmission because activities involve exchange of semen (including pre-ejaculate), vaginal fluids, blood or breast milk. A significant number of scientific studies confirm the association of these activities with HIV infection.
- **Low risk:** Potential for transmission because activities may involve exchange of semen, vaginal fluids, blood or breast milk. A few isolated reports of infection have been attributed to these activities, usually in individual case studies or anecdotal reports.
- **Negligible (or no real) risk:** Potential for transmission because exchange of semen, vaginal fluids or blood is involved, but conditions reduce the efficiency of transmission. No confirmed reports of infection.
- **No risk:** No potential for and no evidence of transmission.

The following table provides a quick summary of the level of risk of individual episodes of different sexual activities. Note that some activities, such as anilingus, may not be high risk for HIV transmission but are high risk for other STIs.

LEVEL OF RISK FOR HIV TRANSMISSION	SEXUAL ACTIVITY
No Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet or dry kissing — no exchange of blood • Masturbation by partner with or without latex glove • Receiving unshared insertive sex toys • Sadomasochistic (S/M) activities using universal precautions • Urination on the body • Contact with feces on unbroken skin
Negligible (no real) Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral sex (fellatio) — performing or receiving with a condom • Oral sex (fellatio) — receiving without a condom • Oral sex (cunnilingus) — performing with a barrier • Oral sex (cunnilingus) — receiving with or without a barrier • Oral sex (anilingus) — performing with or without a barrier • Oral sex (anilingus) — receiving with or without a barrier • Vaginal or anal fingering — performing with or without latex glove • Vaginal or anal fingering — receiving with or without latex glove • Fisting — performing or receiving, with or without a latex glove • Giving insertive sex toys, with or without condom • Receiving shared or disinfected insertive sex toys, with condom • S/M activities, not using universal precautions • Contact with feces, open cuts, lesions, ulcers, burns, rashes • Urination into the body • Vulva-to-vulva rubbing, either during or not during menses • Docking (foreskin over penis of partner followed by masturbation)
Low Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet kissing — with exchange of blood (from bleeding gums, cuts, ulcers) • Oral sex (fellatio) — without a barrier, taking semen/pre-ejaculate in mouth • Oral sex (cunnilingus) — performing without a barrier, either during or not during menses • Penile-vaginal intercourse — insertive or receptive with condom • Penile-anal intercourse — insertive or receptive with condom
High Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penile-vaginal intercourse — insertive or receptive without condom • Penile-anal intercourse — insertive or receptive without condom • Receiving shared insertive sex toys without condom

Source: *HIV Transmission: Guidelines for Assessing Risk*, Canadian AIDS Society (Fifth Edition, 2005)

For more detailed information on safer sex and assessing risk, see *HIV Transmission: Guidelines for Assessing Risk*, developed by the Canadian AIDS Society (fifth edition, 2005), available online at <http://www.cdnaids.ca/web/repguide.nsf/pages/cas-rep-0307>.