

Determining The Risk: Oral Sex & HIV/STDs

STD	“How easy is it to transmit through oral sex?”	“What can happen to someone with this STD?”	“Can having this STD increase my chances of HIV infection?”	“What should I know if my partner or I am HIV positive?”	“What are my chances of having sex with someone with this STD?”
HIV/AIDS	Difficult • Although there are documented cases of people getting HIV from sucking and getting sucked, available research suggests that the risk of HIV from any kind of oral sex is very low .	• HIV is a life changing disease. New treatments are effective for most people, but have side effects and are not effective for some people. • There is no cure for HIV.	• While there are reports of infection with another strain of HIV (super infection, or secondary infection), how this affects the health of someone who is already infected with HIV is unclear.	• New STDs can increase HIV viral load and lower CD4 T cell counts. • Regular check-ups should include throat tests for gonorrhea and chlamydia and blood tests for syphilis. • Hepatitis A and B vaccines are safe in HIV-infected people. • Know the HIV status of your partners and discuss what you BOTH are comfortable doing. • Maintain good dental health.	• It is estimated that about 25% – about 1/4 – of gay men in San Francisco are HIV +. Some of these men do not know they are infected.
Herpes Oral herpes or cold sores are usually caused by the HSV type 1 (HSV-1) and genital herpes by HSV type 2 (HSV-2) However, HSV-1 can cause genital herpes	Easy • Sores and blisters (usually on the lips, genitals, or anus) are very infectious . • Easily passed by sucking/getting sucked, rimming, and licking/being licked. • In many cases the herpes virus can be passed when no symptoms are present.	• Blisters/sores can be very painful. • Some individuals with herpes usually have periodic outbreaks throughout their lives. • Treatment can reduce the frequency and severity of herpes outbreaks but there is no cure .	Yes • Research suggests that having genital herpes can more than double your risk for HIV infection. • The risk of HIV infection is greater for those with new genital herpes infections compared to those with long-standing genital herpes. • Open sores or lesions (even ones that you cannot see) provide easy entry and exit for HIV.	• Outbreaks occur more often, are more severe, and may take longer to heal. • Outbreaks increase the frequency and amount of HIV virus that you shed, making it easier to transmit HIV. • Genital herpes can increase the amount of HIV in your blood (HIV viral load).	High • Nearly 7 out of every 10 Americans have oral herpes (HSV-1) often acquired non-sexually during childhood. • It is estimated that 30-50% of HIV negative MSM and up to 80% of HIV+ MSM have HSV-2.
Syphilis	Very Easy if sores or lesions are present • Easily passed through contact with open sores (commonly called chancres) on the penis, anus, or mouth. • Transmitted through all types of oral sex • Also passed through contact with mucous patches (white spots) in the mouth. • Sexually active gay men should get tested for syphilis at least every three months.	• Sores, warts & rashes of syphilis infection are painless and usually go away. • Can be cured with penicillin. • Left untreated syphilis can eventually cause brain damage, heart disease, blindness and death.	Yes • Open syphilis sores or chancres provide an easy entry and exit for HIV. • White blood cells at the site of infection may increase the chances of HIV infection.	• Syphilis of the brain is more common in people with HIV. • Syphilis can increase your viral load, as well as decrease your CD4 T cell count. • Make sure syphilis testing is part of your routine HIV blood work.	Medium • Syphilis increased by 1000% from 1998 to 2004. About 1 in 100 gay men in San Francisco get syphilis every year. • Two out of three new syphilis cases are in HIV-infected men.
Gonorrhea	Very Easy • When passed through oral sex, gonorrhea is usually passed from the penis into the throat while sucking cock. • It can also be passed from an infected throat to a penis while getting sucked. • Ejaculation does not appear to change the risk of spread of gonorrhea during oral sex. • May be transmitted when no signs or symptoms are present.	• Gonorrhea can cause burning with urination and/or discharge from the penis. • Can cause a sore throat. • Some people have no symptoms at all. • Can be cured with antibiotics.	Yes • Increased white blood cells and inflammation at the site of infection could make it easier for HIV to enter the body.	• It does not appear that HIV infection affects symptoms or treatment of gonorrhea. • Gonorrhea increases the amount of HIV in semen and may make it easier to spread HIV. • Gonorrhea increases HIV viral load.	Medium • About 1 in 10 sexually active gay men have gonorrhea of the throat, penis or rectum.
NSU (non specific urethritis)	Moderately Easy • NSU—non-gonococcal and non-chlamydia urethritis can be caused by common germs in the throat, even cold viruses. • NSU can be passed from both sucking and getting sucked. • May be transmitted when no signs or symptoms are present.	• NSU can cause burning when urinating and/or discharge from the penis. • Infections of the throat can cause a sore throat. • Can sometimes be cured with antibiotics.	Unknown • Increased white blood cells and inflammation at the site of infection could make it easier for HIV to enter the body.	• It does not appear that HIV infection affects symptoms or treatment of NSU. • NSU may increase viral load in semen making it easier to spread HIV.	Medium • About 60% of cases of urethritis—penile discharge or burning—are caused by NSU. • Many different viruses and bacteria in the throat can be spread through oral sex.
Chlamydia	Low • Chlamydia can be found in the throat but less commonly than gonorrhea. • May be transmitted when no signs or symptoms are present.	• Chlamydia infection can cause burning when urinating and/or discharge from the penis. • Can be cured with antibiotics.	Likely • Increased white blood cells and inflammation at the site of infection may make it easier for HIV to enter the body.	• It does not appear that HIV infection affects symptoms or treatment of chlamydia. • Chlamydia appears to increase the amount of HIV in semen making it easier to transmit HIV. • Chlamydia could increase HIV viral load.	Medium • Chlamydia causes penile infections in similar frequency to gonorrhea. • Chlamydia is a more common cause of rectal infection than gonorrhea.
Genital Warts (Human Papilloma Virus)	Unknown • It is not known how easy it is to transmit the genital wart virus through oral sex. • Can be passed by all types of oral sex. • In many cases the HPV virus may be passed when no symptoms or signs are present. • Warts usually appear on the penis or in the anus but may also occur in or around the mouth or lips.	• Spread through skin-to-skin contact, contact with warts or HPV. • Different treatments are available but the virus stays in the body. • While most strains of HPV only cause warts, some strains may cause oral or throat cancers.	Unknown for Oral Sex • Studies have shown an increased rate of HIV infection for people with anal or genital warts who have unprotected anal sex. • Warts may provide an easy entry point for HIV to enter the body.	• Genital warts may be more common and harder to treat. • Studies have found that HPV is more common among HIV positive individuals than HIV negative individuals. • With decreased CD4 T cells, shedding of HPV may increase, making it more infectious. • Anal cancer is 7 times more common among HIV positive than HIV negative MSM.	High • HPV infection and genital warts are the most common STDs. • 70% of sexually active adults have HPV infection. • Check for wart-like growths on the penis, anus, or lips of a sex partner NOTE: Genital warts are sometimes too small to be seen.
Intestinal Parasites (Amoeba, Giardia, Cryptosporidia)	Easy • Intestinal parasites are easily passed through rimming. • Sucking and getting sucked are low risk unless you contact fecal matter (shit) when sucking.	• Symptoms include diarrhea, stomach cramps, bloating, increased gas, and nausea. • Most intestinal diseases can be cured with medication.	Unknown	• If you have a weakened immune system, symptoms may be more severe and parasites may be more difficult to cure.	Low • Rates of new infections in San Francisco are < 100 year. • Most cases in San Francisco occur among gay men and other men who have sex with men.
Hepatitis A	Very Easy • Hepatitis A is very easily passed through rimming. • Sucking is low risk unless you contact fecal matter (shit) when sucking. • Get vaccinated. *	• Hepatitis A can cause weakness, dark urine, jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), and enlarged liver. • Symptoms of hepatitis A usually go away after several weeks.	Unlikely	• It does not appear that HIV infection affects transmission or symptoms of hepatitis A. • Some HIV drugs have toxic side effects that are harmful to the liver. Any disease like hepatitis that affects the liver may increase risk of liver damage.	Moderately Low • Rates of hepatitis A are stable in San Francisco and most cases in San Francisco occur in unvaccinated persons.
Hepatitis B	Moderately easy • While no studies have measured the risk of transmission from oral sex, hepatitis B is highly infectious • Transmitted primarily through unprotected anal sex, shared hygiene products (razors, etc). • Get vaccinated. *	• Hepatitis B can cause weakness, dark urine, jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), and enlarged liver. • 10% of adults infected with hepatitis B become carriers of the virus. Long-term effects can include scarring and cancer of the liver.	Unlikely	• It does not appear that HIV infection affects transmission or symptoms of hepatitis B. • Symptoms can be different for HIV positive individuals. • Some HIV drugs have toxic side effects that are harmful to the liver. Any disease like hepatitis that affects the liver may increase risk of liver damage.	Probably Low • The number of cases of hepatitis B among gay men has decreased significantly since 1985 due to the adoption of safer sex practices for anal sex and vaccination.
Hepatitis C	Difficult	• Most often asymptomatic. • Can cause weakness, lethargy and flu-like symptoms.	Unlikely	• HIV infection can make hepatitis C treatment harder. • HIV can speed up the liver damage from hepatitis C.	Unknown • Blood to blood contact (often via injection drug use) is the main risk.

*Free/low cost hepatitis A and B vaccination is available at City Clinic, MAGNET and 101 Grove Immunization Clinic