Preventing HIV infection

HIV is harder to transmit during sex than many people think. Only five body fluids can contain enough HIV to infect someone: blood, semen (including pre-cum), rectal fluid, vaginal fluid and breast milk.

HIV can only be passed when one of these fluids from a person with HIV gets into the bloodstream of an HIV-negative person—through broken skin, the opening of the penis, the foreskin or the wet linings of the vagina and rectum.

Here are steps you can take to reduce the chances of passing or getting HIV through sex:

- Use a new condom with each partner for anal and vaginal sex. Condoms reduce the chances of passing or getting HIV and other STIs.
- Use lube. It helps make sex feel good and prevents friction, cuts and tears during sex.
- Choose activities with a lower chance of passing HIV, such as oral sex, mutual masturbation and hand jobs.
- Get tested for STIs regularly. Having an STI increases your risk of getting and passing HIV and other STIs.
- If you are HIV positive, consistently taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) can help you maintain low levels of HIV in your blood (also known as an undetectable viral load). Having an undetectable viral load significantly reduces the chances of passing HIV through sex.
- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) involves the daily use of specific HIV drugs as part of a prevention strategy by HIV-negative people to reduce the risks of sexual transmission of HIV. When used consistently and correctly, PrEP can significantly reduce the chances of getting HIV. Talk to your care provider to find out more about PrEP and whether it is right for you.

Keep in mind that ART and PrEP do not reduce the chances of passing or getting other STIs
Disclaimer

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV- and hepatitis C-related illness and the treatments in question.

CATIE provides information resources to help people living with HIV and/or hepatitis C who wish to manage their own health care in partnership with their care providers. Information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE, however, is not to be considered medical advice. We do not recommend or advocate particular treatments and we urge users to consult as broad a range of sources as possible. We strongly urge users to consult with a qualified medical practitioner prior to undertaking any decision, use or action of a medical nature.

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Information on safer drug use is presented as a public health service to help people make healthier choices to reduce the spread of HIV, viral hepatitis and other infections. It is not intended to encourage or promote the use or possession of illegal drugs.

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