



Questions and Answers (Sexual Transmission)

Q. How is HIV transmitted sexually?

A. One way that HIV is transmitted is through sexual contacts. HIV/AIDS is transmitted from one person to another through sexual fluids, both male sexual fluids and female sexual fluids. This does include pre-cum (male sexual fluid released before ejaculation) and blood (including menstrual blood). The virus leaves one person and enters into the body of another. It is possible to become infected in one sexual contact with a person living with HIV, however it is also possible to not become infected. The virus has to enter the bloodstream of a person to infect them and this does not happen in every case. There are factors related to whether a person will become infected if they have sex with a person who is living with HIV/AIDS; including STIs, type of sex, use of protection, if there are tears in the vaginal wall, and others.

Q. How can I have safer sex?

A. In relation to sexuality we can classify certain actions into different categories. First, there are actions that pose no risk for HIV transmission. These include kissing and touching. One clarification with touching is that one does not want to interact with sexual fluids if there are recent cuts (not healed) on the hand. A second category can be considered low risk, including oral sex. Finally, there are high-risk activities including sex without a condom with a person who is living with HIV/AIDS. Sex can be made safer by using condoms, knowing both your own and your partners status, having a fewer number of partners and in the best case one partner whose status is negative who is also committed to only having one partner. Studies have shown that later sexual debut in both males and females reduces the probability of becoming a person living with HIV. To be clear, the probability here is reduced in general; even one sexual contact with a person who is living with HIV can transmit the virus.

Q. Is oral sex safe? How safe?

A. We can say that oral sex is less risky than sex, however we can not say that it is risk-free. Our mouth offers less opportunity for the HIV to be transmitted and infect our bodies. As mentioned, HIV can be transmitted in sexual fluids and transmission during oral sex is possible, however less likely than when compared to sex. Certain factors also increase the probability of transmission. Having cuts or sores in the mouth offer routes for the virus to infect our bodies. STIs can also increase the probability of transmission of HIV during oral sex.

Q. How can I reduce oral sex transmissions?

A. The use of a condom for males, or a dam for females. This prevents exchanges of sexual fluids from one partner to another. When having oral sex, make sure there are no open cuts or sores in the mouth. This may include avoiding oral sex after eating sharp foods or brushing your teeth.