



Safer sex can help you reduce your risk for exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). STDs are spread by sexual contact with an infected person. This occurs through vaginal, anal, or oral sex, and genital touching.



Safer Sex

What is safer sex?

The only way to be absolutely sure of avoiding STDs is to not have any sexual contact. Having safer sex is one of the best ways to protect yourself from STDs. Safer sex uses barriers to reduce the risk of blood or body fluids entering the body. The most common barrier used is the male condom. Barriers should be used during all sexual contact. Barriers include:

- ◆ Male condoms.
- ◆ Female condoms.
- ◆ Other barriers.

How are barriers used?

- ◆ Each time you have sex use a barrier to prevent the spread of STDs, including HIV. Barriers can be made of plastic or latex and protect against viral STDs. Use barriers for:
 - Vaginal sex.
 - Anal sex.
 - Oral sex.
- ◆ Talk to your partner about using barriers:
 - Before sex.
 - Decide on sexual limits that you are both comfortable with.
 - Remember that alcohol and drugs can alter your judgment about if, when, or how to use barriers.

- Decide what type of barrier to use: male or female condoms, or other barriers.
- Make sure to have barriers on hand if there is a possibility that you will have sex.

Condoms kept in a wallet, stored somewhere warm, or that have been washed in the washer should not be used.

Male Condoms

- ◆ Use for oral, anal or vaginal sex
 - ◆ Choose lubricated latex condoms:
 - “Lambskin” or natural condoms do not block HIV or other STDs.
 - If you have allergies to latex, choose polyurethane (plastic) condoms.
 - ◆ Use before the expiration date.
 - ◆ Store in a cool, dry place.
 - ◆ Use a new condom for each sex act, from start to finish.
 - ◆ Always follow manufacturer’s directions for use.
 - ◆ Carefully open the package, make sure there are no holes in the package.
 - ◆ Check the condom for rips or signs of damage like brittleness or stickiness.
 - ◆ Place the condom on an erect penis.
 - ◆ Partially unroll the condom to find the right side, then hold onto the tip of the condom as it is placed on the penis.
- ◆ Use a water-soluble lubricant (e.g., ID Glide, K-Y Jelly, Slippery Stuff, Foreplay, Wet, Astroglide) after the condom is put on to prevent the condom from breaking.
 - Do not use petroleum jelly, massage oils, mineral oil, cooking oil, body lotions, butter, grease, or hand creams as lubricant. These can weaken condoms.
 - ◆ Remove the condom after ejaculation, but before the penis gets soft.
 - ◆ If the condom breaks at any point during the sex act remove it and put on a new one.
 - ◆ Use on sex toys such as dildos or vibrators that are shared:
 - Use new condoms for each partner.
 - Clean sex toys after each use.



Both male and female condoms are available without co-pay at the VA pharmacy.

Female Condoms

- ◆ Use for vaginal sex.
- ◆ Different shape than the male condom.
- ◆ Made of a plastic called polyurethane.
- ◆ Use before the expiration date.
- ◆ Store in a cool, dry place.
- ◆ Use a new condom for each sex act, from start to finish.
- ◆ Carefully open the package, make sure there are no holes in the package.
- ◆ Check the condom for rips or signs of damage like brittleness or stickiness.
- ◆ Always follow manufacturer's instructions for use.
- ◆ Lubricate the vagina *before* inserting the condom.
 - Female condoms are made of polyurethane and are already lubricated.
 - Water or oil-based lubricants can be used.
 - Put lubricant on the inside and outside of the condom.

- ◆ Put the condom on up to eight hours before having sex and before beginning any sexual contact.
- ◆ Squeeze the ring of the closed end and insert into the back of the vagina. Keep the open end outside of the vagina, partially covering the lip area.
- ◆ If the outer ring slips into the vagina, or if the penis is inserted outside of the condom pouch, remove and replace the condom.
- ◆ After sex, remove the condom by twisting the outside ring to trap any fluid before standing up. Throw the condom in the trash.

Other Barriers

Other barriers listed below can also be used to make oral sex safer. These work by reducing contact between blood or fluids and the mouth. Place over the opening to the vagina or anus before oral sex.

- ◆ Natural latex sheet.
- ◆ Cut open condom.
- ◆ Dental Dam
 - A piece of latex rubber found at surgical supply stores.
- ◆ Plastic cling wrap
 - Can offer some protection if nothing else is available. Scientific research on this is questionable.

For more on safer sex see:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Condom Fact Sheet In Brief

www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/brief.html

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health:

Sexually transmitted infections (STI) fact sheet

www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/sexually-transmitted-infections.cfm

HIV/AIDS: Practice safer sex

www.womenshealth.gov/hiv-aids/preventing-hiv-infection/practice-safer-sex.cfm