

what's safe to you?





Introduction

“What’s safe to you?” – is about how safer sex can mean different things to different people.

We know how complicated this question can be for some guys. This is why we put together this booklet. We believe that with a little bit of planning, safer sex can be smart, fun, and involve options other than condoms.

We hope this booklet offers useful information about negotiating the realities of “safety” in a world that often forgets about intimacy, love, desire, and pleasure between men. We also hope this prompts discussion about ways to better take care of ourselves and our partners. Finally, we hope this gives you some tools to make the best decisions that are right for you.



I went all the way across town and after we started getting it on we realized we didn't have any condoms.

It's a good idea to always carry some condoms and lube with you. Top or bottom, don't assume the other guy is gonna take care of it. Finding yourself in a situation where you both are turned on and without a condom can definitely be frustrating. Remember, there are a lot of things you can do besides anal sex. Sucking, rimming, rubbing, and fingering are just a few.



At first we were just slipping the head in. Now we're fucking without rubbers. But we always make sure not to cum inside each other.

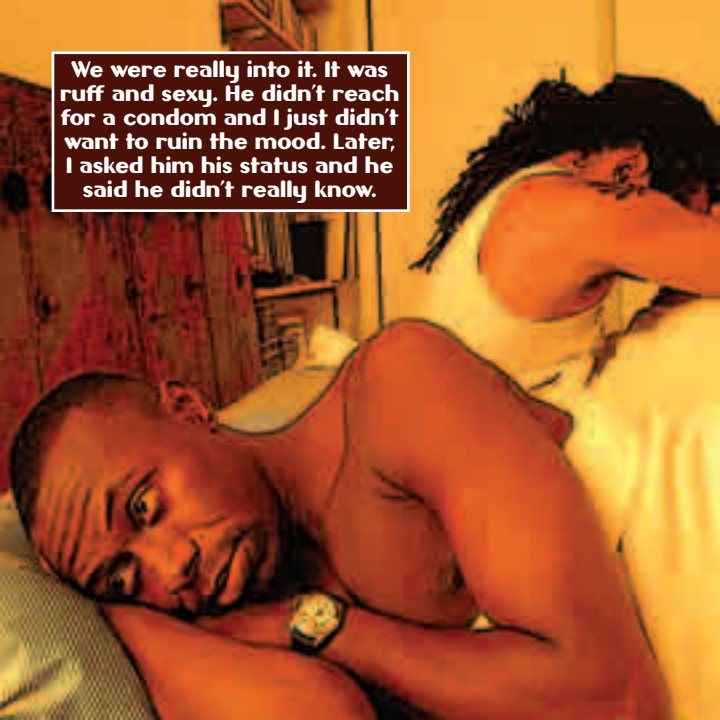
Most of us have experienced dipping, putting the head in, pulling out, and/or withdrawal — call it what you want. All of these are safer than cumming inside someone, but it's not without its risks for the top or bottom. It's important to have conversations about sexual health with your partners. If you're not going to use condoms, pulling out does not eliminate HIV risk and your risk for other STD's. To reduce your risk, always apply lots of lube.



I love hanging out in the steam room at the gym and sucking guys off.

Sucking dick can be mmm, mmm, good! Most guys who get HIV get it from fucking without a condom not sucking without a condom. If you're gonna suck, it's much safer to not take his cum in your mouth. If you do get cum in your mouth, your HIV risk is the same whether you spit or swallow. Good oral health can help minimize your risk but it's not a good idea to brush or floss before or after sucking dick because it can irritate your gums. For fresh breath use a mint or mouthwash.

We were really into it. It was ruff and sexy. He didn't reach for a condom and I just didn't want to ruin the mood. Later, I asked him his status and he said he didn't really know.



The reality is that sometimes we fuck without condoms. In these instances, risk is increased if you cum inside each other. Risk is also increased if it's rough and if there are any open cuts or sores. If you do fuck without a condom, or if a condom breaks or slips off during sex, there is a treatment that may prevent HIV infection, even after the virus has entered the body. It is called Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).


To be effective, PEP should be started ASAP and no later than 72 hours after possible exposure. You can access NPEP through your local EMERGENCY ROOM or physician. PEP drugs have to be taken every day for one month. Many people who have undergone PEP have experienced unpleasant side effects. The most common are nausea and generally not feeling well.



**I only sleep with
POZ guys so I don't
have to use condoms.**

Some experts say that an increase in the number of gay and bisexual men who know their HIV-positive status and who search for HIV-positive partners might be contributing to the decrease in new HIV cases in San Francisco. The dating practice, which is called “sero-sorting,” involves men choosing sex partners based on their common HIV serostatus.


Studies have shown when people have knowledge of their serostatus, they take that knowledge and use it to protect their partners.



We've never used condoms before but I'm starting to have my doubts. I don't know how to tell him I want to start using them.

The decisions you make about using condoms within a relationship belong to you and your partner alone. However, no matter how close you are with your partner, communicating about HIV and STD's can sometimes feel uncomfortable or awkward. If you are already in the habit of not using condoms this could bring up many issues for you both about trust and intimacy.

Sometimes it helps to practice the conversation beforehand or with friends. Although not easy, you should try to bring up the subject in a straightforward and honest way. Make it clear that you are still excited about being attentive to pleasure. You can buy your favorite box of condoms and explain to your partner why you like them. The Internet even provides sample conversations about bringing up the topic with a partner. Even though getting rejected can be scary, it is okay to establish your limits and have conversations in which you and your partner talk about sex, STI's, open vs. closed relationships and condom use.




**I don't use condoms
because they always slip
off or break. Plus I have a
hard time keeping it up.**

The number one reason that condoms usually break or slip off is because people are not using them correctly. Condom breakages are usually caused by using oil-based lubes or not using enough lube. If you are fucking for hours it's a good idea to change condoms at least every thirty minutes. Guys with thick cocks should avoid stretching condoms to fit. Shop around and find the right condom for you.

Condom slippages are usually caused by using too much lube on the inside of the condom or condoms being too big or too small. Also, not rolling the condom to the base of the cock, not withdrawing soon after cumming, and losing your hard-on while fucking may cause a condom to slip off.

Many guys have trouble maintaining erections while using condoms. Cockrings can definitely help. You may also want to talk to your doctor about your difficulty maintaining an erection because there may be other physical or mental health reasons that can be addressed.



I like to be dominated by big, ruff guys and let them have their way with me. If they don't pull out a condom, I just go with the flow.

Role playing during sex can be a real turn-on for some guys. If you don't want to break character during sex, it's a good idea to tell the guy what your limits are and how far you you're willing to go up front. If you want to use condoms, let him know ahead of time. If you both decide not to use condoms you can also discuss other options such as pulling out and cumming on each other's bodies – just make sure there are no open cuts on the skin. If you're the top, it's a good idea to check in with the bottom every now and then.

A close-up photograph of a man wearing a black baseball cap with a white logo on the side, a white hoodie, and a black jacket. He is looking slightly downwards and to the right. The background is a light-colored wall with horizontal lines.

When I fuck raw, I only do it as a top because I don't want to get HIV.

A lot of men top to avoid HIV infection. While being a top is less risky, it's not risk free. HIV can enter the body through the dick and anytime you have unprotected sex you run the risk of getting or giving HIV as well as other STDs such as syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, genital warts and gonorrhea. Check in with your partner before you top him. Even if you don't like to, using condoms should always be an option you give to him.

The Institute For Gay Men's Health, a partnership between AIDS Project of Los Angeles (APLA) and Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) in New York City, is a national public health initiative focused on gay men in the two cities hardest hit by HIV/AIDS in the United States. The Institute's prevention work includes community organizing, peer health education, research and evaluation, mobilizing HIV prevention leadership through summits and conferences, and social marketing campaigns that appear on Web sites and in magazines, billboard and multimedia campaigns, pamphlets and other printed materials.

National Hotlines

**AIDS Project of Los Angeles (APLA) - David Geffen Center
www.apla.org / (213) 201-1600**

**Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) - David Geffen Center
www.gmhc.org / (800) 243-7692**

**Gay and Lesbian National Hotline (US)
www.glnh.org / (888) 843-4564**

**CDC National STD Hotline (US)
www.cdc.gov/std / (800) 227-8922**

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