

Strategies for with effectiveness is low or uncertain *The effectiveness of these strategies is low or uncertain and often depends on other factors. Combining them with other strategies is recommended.*



ADOPTING LOW-RISK PRACTICES

Choosing to adopt sexual practices with the lowest risk in situations where the possibility of transmitting HIV is unknown or high

Description

- Adopting low-risk practices is a strategy in which you choose sexual activities that carry a low risk of HIV transmission in circumstances where the risk of HIV transmission is high or unknown.

Sexual activity without protective barrier (condom, glove)	Risk of HIV transmission ¹⁻⁷
Mutual masturbation	no documented risk
Fingering (anal)	negligible risk*
Sadomasochistic activities (without exposure to blood)	negligible risk
Contact with urine or fecal matter	negligible risk
Anilingus (rimming)	negligible risk
Sharing sex toys	negligible risk
Inserting fist into anus (fisting)	negligible risk
Receiving fellatio (the one getting sucked)	negligible risk
Giving fellatio (the one sucking) without ejaculation in the mouth	negligible risk
Giving fellatio (the one sucking) with ejaculation in the mouth	1 transmission for every 2500 sexual contacts
Insertive vaginal/frontal sex (for the person who penetrates)	1 transmission for every 2500 sexual contacts
Insertive vaginal/frontal sex (for the person who is penetrated)	1 transmission for every 2500 sexual contacts
Insertive anal sex (top)	1 transmission for every 909 sexual contacts
Receptive anal sex (bottom)	1 transmission for every 72 sexual contacts

*A negligible risk means that there is a potential for an HIV transmission, but there have been no or very few confirmed cases. This may however be due to the fact that it is often difficult to know the precise nature of what caused the infection.

- Risk can vary due to numerous factors such as the presence of sperm, the health of the mucous membranes, piercings, the presence of an STI or of ulcers in the mouth, circumcision, and the viral load of bodily fluids.¹⁻³
- Some activities that pose a negligible risk in and of themselves may increase the risk of HIV transmission if done along with anal penetration. Using sex toys or fisting, for example, can weaken the anal lining and increase the level of risk if followed by anal penetration.^{3,4}
- Some measures can decrease the risk of transmission, such as using a lot of lubricant during penetration, pulling out before ejaculation, avoiding anal douches before penetration, avoiding brushing your teeth or using dental floss before oral sex, urinating after ejaculation, and practising good hygiene with respect to your genitals.
- The risk of HIV transmission is different from the risk of transmission for other STIs. Depending on the sexual practices you adopt, this strategy may not protect against the transmission of other STIs.

Effectiveness

- A study comparing the risk related to different sexual activities demonstrated that in the case of sex without a condom⁸
 - giving oral sex instead of practicing anal receptive sex (bottom) is 50 times less risky
 - receiving oral sex instead of practicing insertive anal sex (top) is 13 times less risky

- The effectiveness of this strategy also increases when you make it a part of daily life. In a study evaluating adherence to this strategy over a 12-month period, 38% of HIV-negative and 46% of HIV-positive participants who intended to only have oral sex with their sexual partners stuck with this decision.⁹

Acceptability

- In the *Mobilise!* survey among men who have sex with men in Montreal, nearly all (93%) respondents knew about the adoption of low-risk practices as a risk reduction strategy.¹⁰
- In a Canadian study, 58% of HIV+ men reported using practices other than anal sex as a prevention strategy.¹⁰
- Advantages of adopting low-risk practices:
 - Significantly reduces the risk of contracting or transmitting HIV, depending on the practices used.¹²
 - Make it possible to enjoy sex while reducing your risk.¹²
 - Reducing your own or others exposure to the risk of HIV transmission can be reassuring and help you maintain a sense of control.¹²
 - Does not require use of a service.
 - No costs are involved.
- Disadvantages of adopting low-risk practices:
 - Requires negotiation with your partner to agree on what you will and won't be doing, requiring the ability to communicate and assert yourself.
 - Can be difficult to refrain from some activities in the heat of the action.¹²
 - For some practices, there is still some risk even if it is low.¹²
 - Requires you to inform yourself about different practices and their risks.¹²
 - Most practices that can offer protection against HIV do not protect against other STIs.
 - Refraining from high-risk practices may lead to feelings of sexual dissatisfaction that can undermine your determination to stick with this strategy.¹²

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