

HIV & women who have sex with women fact sheet

Are you a woman who has sex with women?



Check out these specific HIV prevention tips and facts for you.

Women who have sex with women, gay women and bisexual women

As a woman who has sex with women (WSW), you may not always identify yourself as a lesbian, or bisexual.

Many WSW had their first sexual experience with a man, have had multiple experiences with men, or still have sex with men.¹

Is HIV a risk for lesbians?

HIV transmission *is* a risk between women through fingering/fisting, oral sex and sharing sex toys.²
³

The risk is lower than sex involving a man because less bodily fluids are exchanged between women.

Access regular sexual health check ups for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV testing.⁴

Safer sex for women who have sex with women

- Sex is safer when none of your partner's bodily fluids (vaginal secretions, breast milk or blood - including menstruation) enter your body.
- Ensure your partner's fluids do not enter your vagina, mouth or any cuts.⁵

Safe fingering

- Wash your hands before and after sex.
- Use plenty of lube for fingering or fisting, especially for the anus.
- Use latex gloves, especially if you have a cut or sore on your hands.⁶

Safe oral sex (*risk of HIV is minimal*)

- Avoid oral sex if you or your partner have cuts or sores in or around the mouth, or if the receiving partner is menstruating.
- Use a dental dam, or a condom cut open between the vagina/anus and mouth to prevent STI or HIV transmission.⁷

Safe sex toys

- Wash sex toys before and after use and between partners.
- Use a new condom every time sex toys are shared.⁸
- Use sex toys carefully to prevent drawing blood.

Know your rights

You have the right to:

- refuse sex
 - have sex with women
 - practice safer sex.
1. Sexually Transmitted Infections Journal, accessed via BMJ (2003) 'Sexual behaviour of lesbians and bisexual women'
 2. NAM aidsmap 'Female-to-female sexual transmission' [accessed March 2016]
 3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) 'Likely Female-to-Female Sexual Transmission of HIV — Texas, 2012'
 4. NHS Choices (2014) 'Sexual health for lesbian and bisexual women'
 5. GMHC (2009) 'HIV Risk For Lesbians, Bisexuals & Other Women Who Have Sex With Women'
 6. NHS Choices (2014) 'Sexual health for lesbian and bisexual women'
 7. Mayo Clinic (2014) 'Women's Health - Health issues for lesbians - prevention first'
 8. NHS Choices (2014) 'Are sex toys safe?'

Last full review: 10 March 2016

Last updated: 10 May 2017