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.

2. NAM aidsmap 'Female-to-female sexual transmission' [accessed March 2016]
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'
8. NHS Choices (2014) 'Are sex toys safe?'

Last full review: 10 March 2016

Last updated: 10 May 2017