

HIV - High risk sexual behaviors - Sexual risks, part 2



Every sexual exposure to HIV does not carry the same risk. Some types of sexual activity are riskier than others. Sexual behaviors are a very sensitive and private subject. But these behaviors can put you at high risk for HIV infection. So it is better to know the facts. There are some high risk sexual practices and some ways you can reduce that risk:

Anal Sex

Anal sex is the riskiest type of sex for getting or spreading HIV. Receptive anal sex or “bottom” is much riskier than insertive anal sex or “top”. But it is possible for either partner to get HIV. Circumcision may decrease the risk of the insertive partner getting HIV during anal sex. It does not reduce the risk for the receptive partner.

Vaginal Sex

Receptive vaginal sex with penis in the vagina is a high-risk behavior for women. This is especially true for women who have vaginal sex with men who inject drugs or have sex with other men. Men can also get HIV from having sex with a woman who is HIV-positive.



Circumcision may decrease the risk of the man getting HIV during vaginal sex. There is no evidence that HIV risk decreases for a woman with a circumcised male sexual partner. Both partners are more likely to get HIV from vaginal or anal sex if the HIV-positive partner is not on HIV treatment.

The risk of HIV infection from vaginal or anal sex also increases if either partner has another sexually transmitted disease.



You can also reduce your risk of HIV from vaginal or anal sex by always using a condom correctly and taking pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP. PrEP is medicine to prevent HIV infection.

Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.

Text is from HIV/AIDS sources from the Department of Health and Human Services and adapted by HealthReach and Healthy Roads Media. This project has been funded in whole or in part with Federal funds by the National Library of Medicine award number HHSN276201500011I awarded to the Center for Public Service Communications. Images from iStock.com.

Creation Date: March 2017