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## How risky is anal sex?



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Very! Unprotected anal intercourse (inserting the penis into the rectum) is one of the main risk factors for HIV infection. It is also connected to the spread of other infections, including hepatitis, genital warts, clamidia and gonorrhea.

The person receiving the semen is at greater risk of getting HIV because the linings of the anus and rectum are thin (thinner than the lining of the vagina) and tiny tears can allow the virus to enter the blood stream during sex.

### So, anal sex isn't only for gay men?

No. Many people assume that only gay men have anal sex but the reality is that many more heterosexual people have anal sex than do gay men. In the gay community, unprotected anal sex is sometimes referred to as “barebacking” (see Question 13 “How risky is barebacking?”).

Many young people, particularly young women, believe that by having anal (instead of vaginal) intercourse they are protecting their virginity. Anal sex is sometimes called “virgin sex” by young people, and since they believe that it “doesn't count” as sex, and does not lead to pregnancy, many do not think about the need for disease prevention.

There are many definitions of “sex” and “virginity.” Individuals need to decide for themselves how they define sexual activity and virginity. But, no matter how you define it, unprotected anal intercourse is a high risk behaviour for HIV infection.

### How can I make anal sex safer?

There are a number of things you can do to reduce the risk of HIV infection during anal sex:

- use condoms—with proper condom use, anal intercourse is a low risk activity
- use lubrication—water-based lube will reduce the risk of the condom breaking, will reduce the risk of tears or rips of the anus, and will increase sensation for both partners

- use other anal sex activities that are less risky, including anilingus (anal stimulation with mouth/tongue), manual-anal penetration (anal intercourse using fingers or fist), inserting unshared toys (butt plugs, small dildos or vibrators).

## **What if I have had unprotected anal sex?**

- Consider getting tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) so you can protect your health and avoid transmitting infection to your partner(s) (see Question 22 “Should I get tested for HIV?” and Question 23 “How do I get tested?”).
- Also, talk to your partner(s) about safer sex and discuss the possibility of exploring other, less risky activities (see Question 11 “How can I have sex more safely?” and Question 15 “How do I talk about using condoms?”).

***For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.***

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