

Spain has recognised the right of men who have sex with other men (with or without HIV) to live and enjoy their life and sexuality freely, to live their partnership to the full and to be treated equally in social, legal and health matters. In some countries or cultures, however, relations between people of the same sex may be considered improper or lead to discrimination, and may even be forbidden or punished.

For biological, epidemiological and social reasons, men who have sex with men (MSM) have been more affected by HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) than other population groups.

The HIV test

The only way of knowing whether a person has HIV is by doing the test. You can do this test at your health centre, at STI clinics and at some NGOs. There are quick tests that give a result in around 15 minutes. If the result is positive, it must be confirmed with a second test.

How is HIV transmitted?

Sexual transmission of HIV occurs when the virus present in the blood or the semen comes into contact with another person's blood, normally through the mucous membranes or small tears in the anus, the rectum, the mouth or the skin. Recent studies show, however, that when a person with HIV is receiving antiretroviral treatment, her viral load is undetectable and neither she nor her partner show signs of an STI, the risk of transmission reduces considerably. More information is available in [InfoHIVtal 64 HIV transmission](#).

What sexual practices involve the highest risk of HIV transmission?

Penetration

Anal penetration without a condom is a high-risk practice for HIV transmission both for the top and for the bottom partners. As a bottom partner the risk is greater, particularly if you receive the load.

- *To avoid the risk, you can use a condom and a water-based lubricant from the outset. Grease-based lubricants such as creams, oils or Vaseline can damage the condom and cause it to break.*

Felatio

In felatio, or a blowjob, risk occurs when there is ejaculation in the mouth, as semen can transmit HIV upon contact with the mucous membrane in the mouth and with possible tears.

- *The risk is lower if your oral hygiene is good and you have neither tears nor sores. If your partner ejaculates in your mouth, you can spit the semen out and rinse your mouth out with water only. Do not use alcohol or mouthwash as these may damage the mucous membranes in the mouth*

and cause transmission. Neither is cleaning your teeth recommendable, either before or after giving a blowjob.

Sex toys

Sharing sex toys can involve a risk of HIV transmission.

- *To reduce this risk you can place a condom on the toy each time the person using it changes. If this is not possible (e.g. with Ben Wa balls), then each person should use a different toy.*

Group sex

If you wish to reduce the risk of infection when you have group sex, use a new condom each time the person you are penetrating or being penetrated by changes. If you do not change it, the person with the condom will be protected, but the people receiving will come into contact with the blood and fluids of others and, therefore, will be at greater risk of infection.

- *Remember that in group sex sessions it may be harder to use a condom. You can use strategies to negotiate its use.*

What factors may hinder the prevention of HIV?

- Differences in age, origin or education of the constituents of the couple or the power relations established between them may hinder negotiation of the safety levels desirable to safeguard health.
- The preconceived idea that nothing bad will happen and that the physical appearance, age or profession of one's partner can give a clue as to whether they have HIV or other STIs.
- Alcohol and recreational drugs can alter perception of the risk and prompt us to forget preventive measures.

Did you know?

Post-exposure prophylaxis

This is a treatment that may be received on an exceptional basis by people without HIV after high-risk situations: being penetrated anally without a condom (or if the condom breaks) and receiving the load of a man with HIV, for example. If this happens, go to a hospital emergency service so that the professionals there can assess your case. This 28-day treatment reduces the chance of infection by HIV if it is initiated in the first 72 hours (and preferably in the first six hours).

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grupo de trabajo sobre
tratamientos del VIH
contact@gtt-vih.org
www.gtt-vih.org
Barcelona (España)

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nado por:



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