

Toys

Sharing your toys carries a high risk of transmitting infections.

If it's not properly cleaned before being shared, anything that goes into a person's rectum and/or vagina could transmit HIV or other STIs, particularly in a situation where one person uses the object right after another has used it. With the exception of used syringes, inanimate objects do not easily transmit most STIs, including HIV. The few STIs that have been known to 'hitch a ride,' rarely stay alive on an object long enough to be successfully transmitted. Examples of ones that fail to transmit are Trichomoniasis or LGV. Infections not traditionally classed as STIs are another story. The hepatitis viruses are very difficult to clean off objects, so any toy that draws blood can also be a risk for transmitting hepatitis B and C. The emergence of MRSA means you should be aware of how it catches a ride on objects, too.

If you want to avoid these sorts of risks, try the following: if you're a bottom, the best course is to have your own toys and get your top to use them on you. If you're a top, ask your bottom what toys he or she owns and to bring them along. Or, if having sex with more than one bottom, you should assign and mark each toy for use with its associated bottom, only. For example, if you spank someone with a sturdy wire brush, you're going to draw blood. So, tape the bottom's name onto the back of the brush, maybe even tape the brush to the bottom's leg, but don't use it on anyone else. The same applies to dildos, butt plugs, and anything else you insert into someone.

If you put a condom on a toy before you use it, it's a lot easier to clean after play. When sharing toys, cover each with a condom, then dispose of the condom after the toy has been used on one individual. For large toys, you may find that insertive condoms are a useful substitute for standard ones. If you're a top, you can probably think of lots of ways to make your bottom put the condom on the toy!

Cleaning Toys

It's a good idea to clean a toy, even if it's not shared, not only for basic hygiene reasons, but also to prevent an STI in one part of your body from being spread to other parts. It's also important not to transfer feces from the rectum to the mouth, vagina or front hole by using a sex toy first in your ass and then in other parts of your body, because this can lead to infections. This is particularly important if you are a trans woman and have had recent surgery to create a vagina or front hole and are using a vibrator or dilator as part of the healing process.

Make sure any toy with cum, blood, or feces on it, or anything that's been in someone's rectum, vagina, or front hole is properly cleaned. There are medical surface cleaners available at medical supply stores (such as those that contain both butyl cellosolve and isopropanol) that do not provoke skin irritation, so you might want to use one of those instead of hydrogen peroxide. Be sure to check the material safety data sheet of the product before using it.

Hepatitis C, in particular, is hard to completely remove (should you get blood on a toy). Using medical grade surface cleaners that expressly indicate they will kill hepatitis C and MRSA may pose problems when they are used on toys, because it is unclear what these cleaners will do to the materials from which sex toys are made. This is because manufacturers haven't tested them on sex toys. Try applying on a small test area first.

It is not advisable to get these medical grade cleaners onto vaginal, frontal, oral, or anal mucosal membranes. If the cleaner is not properly flushed or evaporated from the toy, you could end up inflaming these body tissues and making them more susceptible to transmission of HIV and other STIs.

Read a manufacturer's instructions for cleaning a toy. Electrical parts need to be protected by removing before cleaning. To clean your toys as thoroughly as possible, we suggest that you:

1. Wash the toy with soap and hot water followed by a rinse;
2. Soak the toy in one part household bleach to nine parts water for at least 10 minutes, because you'll need that long to render herpes inactive. (We have few reported cases of STIs being readily transmitted on inanimate objects. Hepatitis viruses are the exception and can be transferred via objects that have come in contact with bodily fluids);
3. Rinse off the bleach and let air dry;
4. Because bleach does not kill hepatitis B or C, it is advisable to take a fourth step which involves carefully using a medical grade cleaner, following the product's instructions. A medical grade disinfectant that evaporates can be left to dry thoroughly and then rinsed with water.

Note: Some medical grade cleaners cover a broad spectrum of pathogens, such as herpes, hepatitis, HIV, and MRSA, among others. They can eliminate the need to clean with bleach and water described in step 2.

Leather toys are a bit different: **there is no way to sterilize leather, but you can clean it.**

To clean a leather toy (like a whip, flogger, or leather dildo), first wash the tips or ends with a strong foaming cleaner using a hard bristle brush to get at nooks and crannies in the leather; then spray the tips or ends well with hydrogen peroxide (or a medical grade disinfectant, such as one with butyl cellosolve), wipe away the excess with clean towels, and let them air dry for at least a few hours (preferably overnight) before using them. Cleaning dries out the leather, so your toy should be treated with a leather conditioner immediately after it has dried, or it could become brittle and crack.

Finally, most sex toys are sold as novelties. This means they don't meet any specific sanitary regulation. It's a good idea to establish a relationship with a trusted supplier, in order to talk about pros and cons of any toy you may purchase.

Lubricants

Lubricants (lube) for sex can be lots of fun, whether used for play or insertion. A good rule for sticking anything into the body is: too much lube is not enough. If you don't use enough, you may cause tiny tears and abrasions, which are openings for infections, and can cause discomfort after play.

Different types of play call for different types of lubricants. Silicone-based lubes are more expensive, but you'll need less and they remain slicker longer than water based lubes. Good for rough or extended sex. On the other hand, be careful not to use silicone lube with silicone sex toys. It can dissolve the surface of the toy and make it sticky and hard to clean.

Some people are sensitive to the scents added to some lubes. To be sure, use unscented lubes when inserting anything into somebody. Flavoured brands can be used externally or for oral sex. You can learn more about lubricant options by asking around or consulting your retailer.

Never use oil-based lube with a latex condom, because oil breaks down latex quickly. Oil based lube can be used with most non-latex condoms. (See more in the Condoms section.)

Whatever lube you choose, when playing with more than one bottom, there is a high-risk of contamination from one bottom to another via the lube container. This can happen in the same scene or in subsequent scenes and is believed to be the way in which some people acquire hepatitis or MRSA. It's easy to avoid this risk with a little preparation.

During play, do not take lubricant from a large shared container. Either use small portions in disposable packets or, before play, put individual portions of lube into a disposable container, such as a paper cup. The easiest way to be safe is to ensure that you have more than enough lubricant prepared for each bottom before play starts. For certainty, dispose of contaminated portions following play so that you start with fresh lube each time you play.

Condoms, Gloves, and Dams

Condoms are a good way to reduce the risk when you're getting it on. They can be used for oral, vaginal, frontal, and anal sex. A condom drastically reduces your risk of HIV and other STIs, by creating a barrier to semen and blood.

You can find a wide variety of latex condoms, as well as ones made from other materials, such as polyisoprene or nitrile. These materials accommodate people with latex sensitivities and those who prefer oil-based lubricants. You can also find thin condoms, for increased sensitivity. Don't forget that condoms can also be used to cover sex toys, which provides additional protection and also makes clean-up easier.

In addition to male condoms, the insertive condom (or "female" condom) is an option for both men and women. The first generation of insertive condom is polyurethane or polyisoprene, while the newer generation is made of nitrile. Both are a sheath in the shape of a round, upside-down baggie designed to be inserted into the vagina or front hole before sex.

They can also be inserted in the anus. An insertive condom provides a robust barrier between partners, which prevents the sharing of bodily fluids like semen, blood, and saliva. Some gay men we know refer to the insertive condom as the "pig" bag. While the material is durable and suitable for rough sex, multiple top partners are not protected if they come into contact with semen from another already deposited. Ideally, the bag is changed between partners.

Some men and women find the insertive condom a carefree way to enjoy anal intercourse. Insertive condoms can be put in place up to eight hours before intercourse and are only effective when in place prior to intercourse. They do take a bit of getting used to. The polyurethane or polyisoprene material becomes more comfortable after body heat has softened it, while the nitrile warms in quicker time. The nitrile version also has the added benefit

Douching and Enemas

Most people into fucking, toys, or fisting feel it is very important to have a clean rectum. Incomplete rectal douching can leave fecal matter that is likely to cause abrasion in the rectum; this can make you more vulnerable to infection. However, douching or enemas before any rectal or vaginal play washes away the surface mucus that's there to protect you. For these reasons, it's important to clean well, to allow around an hour or so before play for the mucosa to recover, and to use lots of lubricant during play. For the most comfortable and safest douching experience, use warm water at low pressure and take your time. Use only plain water without soap. For some, the douching experience is a foreplay ritual, or it can be enjoyed as the main course of a scene.

Never share your douche bag or the nozzles of shower douches. Clean them each time you use them (see the section on Cleaning Toys).

Douching or enemas should not be performed after sex, because they don't necessarily wash things away—they can push infected semen, blood, or feces farther into the body. Infections and bacteria douched up into a woman's uterus and fallopian tubes can cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), which is painful, could lead to infertility or ectopic pregnancies (the egg growing in a fallopian tube). An ectopic pregnancy can be life threatening.