

ever, he needs to give her an assurance that he has not been engaging in risky behaviour between testings- and she needs to trust him).

Questions to ask

How do you know if a new lover is infected or is at risk? The simplest answer is to ask- to discuss the matter openly. After all, it's your health that is at stake. Ask if they've had sex with men who might be at risk - gay, bisexual or straight. Ask if they've had sex with women who have sex with men.

By now you get the picture that this is not an easy issue with which one confronts a potential lover. As a MAP AIDS line counselor, I have come to the conclusion that the safest plan for people beginning a new sexual relationship is to know your partner and to discuss the matter openly. Ask a new lover to go get tested with you. If you both test negative, wait 6 months - in the meantime, stay monogamous and use safer sex practices. Go get tested again. If you both test negative a second time, you can rest assured that you don't have anything to worry about and can relax the precautions you've been using. However, this also assumes that you're both being monogamous and aren't putting yourself at risk in any way.

If you aren't willing to go through this, then simply insist on using safer sex practices with everyone with whom you have sex regardless of what they may tell you regarding their sexual history. People are prone to lie when it comes to revealing parts of their past of which they may be ashamed. Lesbians are especially reluctant to reveal that they have slept with men or used IV drugs.

Safer Sex for Lesbians

Body fluids to be concerned with are: blood (including menstrual blood), vaginal secretions, urine, feces, and breast milk. Don't allow any of these fluids to enter your body.

If sex in any manner causes bleeding, use a barrier, finger cots, dental dams (Flat squares of latex used by dentists), microwaveable plastic wrap, latex gloves, or a condom cut in half.

If you have a cut or sore on your hands, use a latex or vinyl examination glove.

Always use a barrier during cunnilingus - no one knows yet how great a concentration of the HIV virus

is found in vaginal fluids. It's especially risky if your partner has her period or even a mild vaginal infection. Open sores in the mouth make transmission more likely.

One suggestion is to make a pair of "safe sex pants" - cut out the gusset of a pair of underpants and fix a latex barrier in its place.

If using a dildo for more than one person at a time, put a condom on it or clean it with bleach between uses (household bleach diluted 1 part bleach with 10 parts water)

Anal sex with hands or mouth should only be performed with a glove or a dental dam or plastic wrap as a barrier.

Make sure no blood or infected discharge gets into cuts, orifices or eyes.

Use condoms for sex with men- ALWAYS.

Use a water-based lubricant, when using condoms, containing nonoxynol-9 which is known to destroy the virus. Oil-based to destroy rubber and vinyl.

Sex involving contact with urine can be risky since urine can contain blood.

Oral-anal contact apart from other health risks, can be risky because HIV may be transmitted by blood in feces. Open sores in the mouth or bleeding gums make transmission more likely.

Fisting (hand in rectum or vagina) is risky because the walls of the rectum and vagina can be easily injured and the inserting partner's fingers or hand may be exposed to blood, bloody feces, or vaginal fluids. It's also risky because there can be small cuts, hang nails, etc on the inserting partner's hand. Using plenty of water-based lubricant and wearing disposable latex gloves reduces risk.

If you shoot drugs, clean the needles with bleach. In conclusion, no one wants lesbian women to be consumed with fear every time they have sex, but they do need to be realistic and cautious when it comes to new partners. Be aware of what the risks are and take the necessary precautions. Believe it or not, it is possible to be romantic an erotic and still be safe.