

Safe Sex in Toyland

Sex toys can be lots of fun whether you are playing by yourself or with a partner. A few basic hygiene tips can make sure it's all good clean fun. Many people don't realise however, that toys pass on HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs). So be sure you've got some latex and lube in your toy box, and follow the cleaning guidelines below.

Latex & Lube

Like other forms of unsafe sex, sharing toys puts you at risk of contracting and passing on HIV and STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, hepatitis, and genital warts. Many people with an STI have no symptoms, so unless you and your partner(s) have been tested you have no way of knowing what you do or don't have. While there is no cure for HIV, many STIs (eg chlamydia) can be easily treated with a simple course of antibiotics.

The best way to keep your toys safe and clean is to cover them with a condom – or a latex glove if that's a more appropriate shape – every time you use them. Use a new condom each time, and replace it when you switch between vagina, anus or mouth, and if you share a toy with a partner. Condoms stop bodily fluids like blood, semen and vaginal fluids from being exchanged.

Using lubricant with toys can enhance pleasure and reduce friction, which lessens the chance of causing abrasions that can allow viruses and bacteria to enter the body more easily. Use water-based lube, such as KY jelly or Wet Stuff, as oil-based products weaken condoms and increases the risk of breakage. Oil-based lubricants, such as massage oils, Vaseline and baby oil, can also damage some sex toys, and makes them difficult to clean.

Cleaning Your Sex Toys

To reduce the risk of infection, sex toys should be cleaned after each use.

Most toys, including rubber, latex and vinyl toys, and jellies, can be washed with a mild soap and warm water then rinsed well. When cleaning vibrators, any plastic attachments can be submerged in warm soapy water, but be careful not to let the part that holds the batteries get wet. Electric vibes should not be submerged at all.

Silicone toys that aren't battery-operated can be boiled or cleaned with a bleach solution and thoroughly rinsed (follow the directions on the bottle).

Items made from Cyberskin should be rinsed with hot water, avoiding any electrical parts, or lightly rubbed with a cloth dampened with alcohol.

Vinyl and leather harnesses can be wiped with a damp, soapy cloth, and nylon webbing harnesses can go in the washing machine.

Sex toy cleaning fluid can also be used and is available from some adult toy stores.

Don't put toys away when they are wet – let them air dry first, as bacteria cannot live on clean, dry surfaces.

10 Safe Sex Tips

- If you have ever had unprotected sex get tested
- Use condoms or dams every time you have sex (a dam is a latex square held over the vulval area when having oral sex with a woman or over the anus when having anal-oral sex)

- How a person looks and what they tell you about themselves may not reflect their sexual health status. Many STIs have no symptoms, so always take precautions
- Talk about safe sex early on in a relationship and don't wait until the heat of the moment
- Let your partner(s) know if you notice any symptoms such as a rash or an unusual discharge – they should get tested too
- STIs can cause serious health concerns, even when there are no symptoms, so get tested and treated as soon as possible
- The first known case of woman-to-woman HIV transmission via toys happened when one partner was menstruating – be extra careful at this time as blood can carry HIV, hepatitis C and other infections
- Store condoms in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight and check the expiry date on the packaging before use
- Ever woken up and regretted having sex with someone or forgotten to use a condom? Be aware drugs and alcohol can impair judgement in many areas, including practising safe sex
- Enjoy yourself ~ safe sex can be hot sex, so get creative

Practising safe sex reduces the risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

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<http://www.fpwa-health.org.au>

Contact Details:

Address: 70, Roe St., PO Box 141, Northbridge, WA, 6865, Australia.

Ph (08) 9227 6177

Fax (08) 9227 6871