



Exporing Oral Sex.

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I have spoken to a number of male workers of late who tend to disregard condom usage when practising oral sex in and outside of the work place. The debate over whether or not oral sex is or isn't safe continuously throws confusion into the community and I have spent many hours discussing this very topic. Is oral sex a high, low, or no risk activity. I decided to look into this grey area to hopefully come up with some clearer answers.

"Orogenital Sex Between Men" a report which was researched and produced by Darryl O'Donnell for the Educational Working Party of AFAO stated, "anal intercourse and unsafe injection are the principal modes of infection & transmission of HIV between men. It also needs to be made clear that oral sex is not a significant risk for transmission under typical circumstances".

But what constitutes 'typical circumstances'?"

Darryl O'Donnell from the Victorian AIDS Council / Gay Mens Health Centre refers to "typical circumstances" in this instance, to be the normal condition of the oral cavity. Therefore no cuts, lesions or STDs present in the mouth.

The report contained a special note for male workers in the sex industry affirming that, "for many sex workers, the condom provides not only a physical barrier, but a psychological barrier to contact with the client. Moreover, in the sex industry, sex is not only a "private" behaviour, but is an activity on which the sex worker may be dependant for income. The presence of an STD may affect the ability of a sex worker to maintain that income while the infection is present."

Subsequently, sex worker organisations have generally taken the stance that "a risk is a risk" and guidelines for sexual safety have tended to be more stringent than those adopted by other AIDS education agencies [1994:55].

Should sex worker organisations be more stringent and insist on condom usage at all times in and out of work?

Or should we follow the advice we (as gay men) receive from the AIDS Council, that the use of condoms for oral sex over estimates the risk factor and that oral sex is "OK", providing that you have no cuts, lesions or STDs in the oral cavity which may provide a route of entry for transmission of HIV?

One point the AIDS Council makes clear is that the frequency of oral sex will have an impact on the risk factor. Large scale studies which in the past have involved many thousands of men, have failed to establish that oral sex is a risk behaviour for HIV transmission. A large proportion of gay educators are of the opinion that transmission of HIV through oral sex is considerably lower than the risk of being hit by a bus. But simple logic will vindicate, that the more times you cross a road the higher the risk is of being hit by that bus. I feel the same simple logic applies to oral sex. And sex worker organisations around the world tend to agree.

It is the frequency of sex which influences sex worker organisations to adopt the policy "a risk is a risk" and it is this very reason why we insist on condom usage. Additionally we must not become complacent, and forget that there are many STDs which are incurable and transmitted easily through oral sex. Even under "typical circumstances"

Condoms are your best protection from infection & transmission of HIV and STDs. If you are providing a fully inclusive service you should use a minimum of 4 condoms. 2 for 2 way oral and 2 for 2 way anal. Of course for those workers who do doubles acts you will need to use a fresh condom if your partner has performed oral sex on the client before you and vice versa.

Condoms will protect you and your livelihood and this article is as much for HIV positive men as for HIV negative men or men of undetermined status.

It remains to this day the individuals choice as to whether or not to use condoms and for you to determine the frequency in which you perform oral sex.

If you choose not to use condoms whilst practising oral sex on the grounds that the risk of contracting HIV are said to be minimal. You will increase the risk of contracting STDs and therefore the risk of HIV transmission will be increased

Hopefully this article will at least provide you with some views on the risk of HIV transmission when practising oral sex. The bottom line as far as the sex industry is concerned is that if you continue to practise unprotected oral sex, you are placing yourself at high risk of contracting a STD. A risk is a risk. Think about it.

