

# Safer Sex Options

by Serolynne

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So, what options does your polyamorous group have for safer sex? Here are just some options and considerations that I've either personally experienced or talked with others about:

## Condom Contract/Fluid Bonding

Some groups that have a stable number of people may choose to all get tested for STDs and then form what is called a condom contract or fluid bonding. This means that protection for STDs does not have to be used amongst members of the group. However, for any relationships outside of the bonding, protection must be used. Some groups select to have a closed model where there are no outside relationships without the group deciding as a whole to bring someone new into the bonding. And other groups might leave things more open ended and allow for outside partners with barrier protections.

Additionally, usually these groups have requirements for regular testing. Perhaps annually for each member (I further recommend staggering out when each member gets tested, so that effectively - the whole group is being tested multiple times a year) or before each time a new partners is brought in.

## Sexual Health and History Disclosure

Many poly folks request that a sexual health and history be disclosed to help determine what level of sexual contact they're comfortable with. I find this to be an excellent idea, and recommend that you keep yours up to date and ready to go. Don't be afraid to ask for one from anyone you're considering for a sexual partner.

Such a disclosure might include your most recent STD test results, any past STD diagnosis and their current status, your fertility status, method of birth control used/preferred, listing of current and past partners - including the type of contact you've had with them. How far back in your history you should go is up for debate - some say a couple years is enough, and some folks request a full lifetime history.

You're welcome to use the form I use for my disclosure, which is fairly comprehensive. [Sexual Health and History Template](#) (It's in Excel format, right click and select 'Save Target' to download to your computer). Feel free to modify for your own use, or use it as is. And yes, please pass it on!

## Barrier Protections

Condoms, dental dams, latex gloves and finger cots are examples of barrier protections. They seem to be fairly effective against a variety of STDs when used correctly. Many folks consider barrier sex, particularly using condoms for intercourse, to be practicing safer sex. However, barriers are not a magic force field that will protect you from everything. Some of the STDs, like HPV (genital warts/cervical cancer), HSV (herpes) and Syphilis are spread by skin contact to an infected area. Those infected areas can, and do, occur outside of skin that is protected by a condom. And, on top of that... these STDs can be transmittable even if there are no visible symptoms.

In addition, condoms can fail. They can slip off or break. And I've known my share of men who simply can't use them effectively - they produce too much pre-ejaculate and/or do not keep consistent erections throughout intercourse. This makes condoms frustrating at best to use for some people. Some folks are allergic to latex and can only use the polyurethane devices, which come in limited sizes which might not fit right. Use of the female condom might be a better option, or considering a fluid bonding if it's practical.

Discuss with your partners and potential partners about how they feel about condoms. Are they comfortable using them? Are they allergic or sensitive to latex? Do they know how to use them properly? How often do they fail for your partner? Discuss what you'll do in event that the condom does fail.

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If you decide that barrier protection is good enough for you, know that you are risking exposure to HPV, HSV and Syphilis, and don't assume you don't need to keep up with testing for these because you used a condom. Decide what activities will require barrier protection - dental dams for oral sex? Gloves for manual sex? Condoms for penis-in-vagina and/or anal intercourse? Condoms when sharing toys?

## A Word about Oral Sex

There's a common perception that oral sex is safer than intercourse, and thus I've met many folks who consider only having oral sex to be their version of safer sex. And while it is safer in comparison, it is far from being risk free. There is increasing evidence that many STDs can just as easily survive in the mouth as in the genitals, meaning that many can be transmitted from mouth-to-genital and from genital-to-mouth.

Some examples include being able to transmit HSV-1 (more commonly and socially known as 'cold sores') to the genitals, causing a genital herpes infection. HPV can also be transmitted to the mouth, and vice versa, and there is increasing evidence that many mouth cancers are also caused by the HPV virus.

Assess the risks for yourself and decide with your partner(s) what your views and policies will be in regards to oral sex.

## Find other ways of connecting

If you're not comfortable opening up a risk with someone, consider alternate ways of sexual sharing. There is a wide variety of things that you can do that have very limited risk associated with them, but yet can be quite fulfilling. Some ideas include:

- Manual sex with or with/out gloves with washing with hot water and soap before touching yourself or anyone else.
- Same room masturbation (with no cross touching)
- BDSM play (spanking, sensation play, light bondage, power exchange, etc.)
- Fantasy/role playing
- Webcam, phonestex and/or cybersex
- Erotic massage
- Tantric energy exchange
- Toys