Can you get any diseases from kissing? [1]

Dear Alice,

My super-paranoid parents went krazy when they caught me kissing my boyfriend. They say that you can get diseases (!) from kissing alone, even AIDS. And here I was thinking I was being safe by not having sex! Is there any real danger in kissing someone with no sores or cuts or anything like that in or around their mouth? Please help!

- Petrified Pucker

Answer

Dear Petrified Pucker,

No need to be petrified the next time you pucker up with your beau. As long as you both have a clean bill of health and are free of any infection, plain ol’ kissing (including the deep or ?French? variety) is highly unlikely to transmit any disease. Even if someone has HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) there is a very slight chance of transmission to another person [2] (not due to swapping spit, but from contact with blood from open sores or cuts in the mouth). That being said, it?is good to keep in mind that the exchange of saliva can spread some other microbes and infections. So, when one partner is under the weather, it might be time to come up for air and wait until both individuals are healthy before belting out the next verse of ?Besame Mucho? [3].

So, what might you be at risk for whilst snogging? You could get a cold [4], the flu [5], mono [6], or the herpes virus [7] through kissing if the other person is infected. You can also spread meningitis [8] through saliva. Oral microbiota (found in the saliva and on the tongue) and bacteria (in the saliva) which can lead to gum disease [9] ? can be transmitted through frequent kissing. More specifically, gingivitis (one type of gum disease) can turn into periodontitis (a more severe form of gum disease) [10] if not treated properly. That means your partner?s oral health may have an impact on your own oral health if deep smooches are a regular thing for you two.

One last thing to consider: what reasons might your parents have for being concerned about your kissing habits? Are they worried because of religious or cultural reasons? Is it based on the belief that kissing will lead to other sexual activities? Are they concerned that you may not be ready for a relationship? Think about why they responded the way they did. You might also consider asking them to have a conversation with you about their concerns. As uncomfortable as direct conversations with parents can be, having an open dialogue may shed some light on
what's really bothering them. If you're worried about starting a conversation with your parental units about this, consider reading Ugh...parents just don't understand [11] for a few helpful strategies and tips. Here's to a future of worry-free lip locking!

Alice!
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