Dear Alice,

I have a question about sex in swimming pools and hot tubs. Will the chemicals deteriorate a condom? Also, can spermicide be used in water or will it be washed away? Please answer. Thank you.

?Curious

Answer

Dear Curious,

Condoms aren't typically tested in pools or hot tubs, or with chemicals found in these hot, wet places. But even without testing underwater sex — whether in the pool, hot tub, ocean, lake, river, shower, or bath — isn't considered a safer sex option. Here's why:

- Hot tub or pool water does not kill or immobilize sperm; women who have sex with men can get pregnant in a hot tub.
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be passed between sexual partners in a hot tub.
- Spermicide is likely to "wash off" or wash away in water.
- Water containing chemicals, salt, or bacteria can be forced into the vagina or rectum during sex, possibly causing irritation, infection, or temporary dryness.
- Since it's recommended to store latex condoms away from direct sunlight, it's possible that the heated water of a hot tub may have a similar effect in breaking down latex.
- Water can seep between the condom and the penis, possibly causing the condom to slip off.
- Oil-based products that come off in water — such as sun screen, lotion, shampoo, conditioner, and soap — and possibly even chlorine can cause latex condoms to deteriorate.

Of course, using a condom in a pool or hot tub or other body of water is better than not using one at all, but it's effectiveness may be seriously compromised. Rather than springing for a roll in the tub, you may want to consider the hot tub as a location for relaxing pre- or post-action.

Alice!
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Safer Sex [3]  
Contraception [4]  
Condoms [5]

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