Dear Alice,

Because of religious beliefs and our upbringing, my boyfriend and I are both virgins, and have decided to practice abstinence until we are married someday (to each other or someone else? Who knows?!?). Well, sometimes when we are making out, we get really into it. Our clothes always stay on, but next weekend, we are going to stay in a hotel. (He is taking me some place five hours away, so we have no choice.) Anyway, this hotel has a hot tub in the room. We will only have our bathing suits on - is there any possibility for sperm to travel through the water? Should we use some kind of protection even though we are not going to have sex? We do not want anything to happen. This may seem very silly, and I may seem very naive, but I cannot ask anyone else, and I worry about things like this. Thank you very much.

Answer

Dear Reader,

No doubt your boyfriend's sperm are healthy little olympians, but the chances they'd go spelunking into your vagina without having intercourse, or in the situation that you've described, are about the same as them calling the front desk for more towels. In other words, worry not, have a good time, and remember that there's no such thing as a silly question.

Sperm don't up and leave the penis for a little sightseeing on their own, your boyfriend would have to ejaculate for them to even get their feet wet. Once in the tub - which might as well be Lake Michigan given their size - they'd lose steam before ever having the chance to swim inside you - even if you and your beau's genitals are pressed together in a synchronized swim. It takes a lot of sperm released inside the vagina for one to reach the egg - and that's by no means a guarantee of pregnancy. All this is also true for pre-ejaculate, which may contain stray sperm that can exit the penis in small amounts before ejaculation.

Your bathing suit barriers might make conditions tougher than they would already be for sperm to go very far, but they are porous, allowing sperm (and microorganisms) to come and go as they please. Oh, let's not forget about the chemicals in hot tubs and the heat of the water that create unfavorable conditions for those same swimmers. If your boyfriend were to ejaculate, it might make you feel better if you could put a little physical distance between yourselves just before the sperm leave their starting blocks, but it isn't necessary.

Your concerns are shared in one way or another by many of your fellow readers, as you will see if you read the Related Q&As. And along with "silly," you can cross "naïve" off the list of
adjectives you use to describe yourself? at least when it comes to knowing what you do and
don’t want sexually. We all wonder about how things work, where they go, why they look the
way they do? especially when those things have to do with sex. Answers can be like life
jackets? and you’re smart and brave enough to reach for one.

Have a great weekend,

Alice!

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