Dear Alice,

If we are engaging in mutual masturbation, and I get semen on my hands, how long should I wait before touching my partner's vulva? What constitutes being safe in this case (referring strictly to birth control here)? What if I dry my hands with tissues? Will the remaining sperm die in a couple of minutes exposed to the air? Or do I have to wait longer to be safe?

Handy

Answer

Dear Handy,

Many a person’s first sexual activity, masturbation isn't only for solo play; it may be even more fun with company! Masturbation with more than one person together is often referred to as mutual masturbation. Whether solo or social, this activity is one of the safest forms of sex play. Yet there are a few precautions helpful in prevention of pregnancy and STIs.

For pregnancy prevention, try to avoid ejaculating on or near the vulva. Watch out for precum, too. Although the risk of pregnancy is significantly reduced if semen comes into contact with only the external parts of the vulva, there remains still a potential risk of pregnancy. Contact with mucous membranes (such as the inner labia, clitoris, vagina walls, or anus) allows for risk of transmission of STIs. Drying your hands before touching your partner's genitals with tissues is likely to be effective. Fresh sperm carry the risk of still impregnating your partner. Washing and drying your hands thoroughly may be better, but if this isn't practical, keep a towel by the bed (instead of tissues) and dry your hands thoroughly. It may be beneficial, as you mentioned, to wait an additional few minutes, which you may creatively spend exciting your partner without your hands.

Mutual masturbation has many loyal fans, yet many others haven't discovered its magic. So what's so great about it?

- **STI and pregnancy prevention.** So you and your partner want to get it on, but have no condoms or dental dams? This is a great option.
- **Orgasmic precision.** Mouths, tongues, and other body parts may be a lot of fun. But hands have skills and dexterity unmatched by many other body parts. For many, manual stimulation produces the strongest orgasms, mainly because hands are best able to apply the right pressure, speed, and timing. They often have excellent stamina, as well.
Main course or side dish. This activity is quite versatile: it may be served as foreplay or it may finish things off. It may be the primary activity you build up to, or it may be one of many adventures you have during your tryst.

Sick of the same old thing. Because of all the shame and secrecy surrounding masturbation, this activity is a well-kept secret. Many couples have never tried it. If you're in need of new fun activities, this is a good one to try. You may learn a thing or two of how to please your partner, too.

What's in a name? Hand job, JO (jerk off), rubbing, massage, stroking, shaking hands with Ms. or Mr. Happy, firing the Surgeon General...the list is endless. Perhaps it has so many names because it has spread so much joy.

Its versatility doesn't stop there. Don't forget, it may involve more than two people, role-play, fantasy, and/or toys. So try to get out your lube, turn down the lights, warm up your hands, and grab your towels. It's likely to be a fun and safe time.

Here's to the 5-Digit Disco,

Alice!

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