Safer sex in hot water [1]

1) Dear Alice,

Is having sex in the shower that is hot or in a hot tub safe? Someone told me the heat kills the sperm. I thought it sounds dumb but I was just wondering.

Thanks,

Waterman

2) 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 Waterman and Curious,

Many inquisitive minds have asked the same questions and luckily, you?ve both come to the right place for sorting fact from fiction. Getting hot and heavy in a shower, tub, or pool might make sex more interesting, but don?t bank on the water or heat as protection. No matter if the water is hot, salty, or chlorinated, having sex in water can still result in pregnancy, sexually transmitted infection (STI) transmission, and transmission of other infections if not using precautions. However, there are ways to have safer sex in the water; they just might require a little bit of planning.

People often wonder if sperm still "work" in water. The answer depends on the environment and where a person ejaculates. Soaking in a hot tub for more than 30 minutes may slightly lower sperm count but can't actually kill sperm within a person?s body. If a person ejaculates into the water, the sperm likely can't survive for more than a few minutes due to temperature, soaps, or chemicals. Medical experts agree that it's extremely unlikely for sperm floating around in a watery environment to swim into a vagina. However, pregnancy may still result from unprotected underwater sex if sperm is ejaculated directly into a vagina (even if the pull-out method [2] is used since pre-ejaculate may contain sperm, too). Another potential concern with exchanging ejaculate and other bodily fluids is STI transmission (including HIV),
which is still possible in underwater environments.

To lower the chance of pregnancy or STI transmission during underwater sex, it's helpful to know which contraceptive and protection methods won't slip and slide off. It's advised that folks avoid using methods including external (male) latex condoms, spermicidal substances, cervical caps, and diaphragms. External latex condoms are likely to slip off in the water. Even if the condom doesn't slip off, water may get trapped between the condom and the penis, thereby loosening the condom and reducing its protective abilities. Also, high temperatures and chlorine may deteriorate the condom and cause it to break. Additionally, remnants of oil-based products such as sunscreen, bath oils, and soaps in the water may come into contact with the condom and reduce its durability. If any external condom is used (regardless of material), it's recommended to put the condom on before getting into the water to reduce the likelihood of slippage. Spermicidal substances are also not suitable for underwater sex because they're likely to dissolve or wash away. Cervical caps and diaphragms also may move around in the vagina when exposed to excess water, making them less effective.

So, what are the more effective alternatives? In terms of contraceptives, birth control pills, patches, rings, and IUDs, all function just as well in water as they do elsewhere. Other waterproof and more long-term contraceptive methods also include having a vasectomy, tubal ligation, or the Essure procedure [3]. However, these contraceptive methods don't prevent STI transmission. For pregnancy prevention and protection against STIs underwater, a more effective alternative is the internal (female) condom [4]. They're suitable for water sex because they're not likely to slip out of the vagina, and they're non-latex. Inserting the internal condom before hopping into the water to ensure correct placement is advised (and they can be inserted up to eight hours in advance for those who like to plan ahead).

Aside from pregnancy and STIs, some other underwater sex considerations include a higher risk for irritation and vaginal and urinary tract infections [5]. Water may wash away natural vaginal lubrication and the resulting increased friction may pose a higher risk for irritation and micro-tears. This creates a higher chance for vaginal soreness and infections. Using a silicone-based lubricant may help reduce the increased friction caused by watery environments.

So, getting frisky in the water while reducing risk is definitely possible; it just takes a few extra steps to make it safer and enjoyable.

Here's to making a splash,

Alice!

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Resources

Safer Sex Map (Morningside/ Barnard) [13]
Alice! Health Promotion (Morningside) [14]
Center for Student Wellness (CUMC) [15]

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