Dear Alice,

Can you contract HIV from anal fingering your partner if you had cuts/scratches on your fingers?

Answer

Dear Reader,

There is a possibility of HIV transmission any time there is sexual contact without a barrier, such as a condom or dental dam, especially if someone has a cut. However, the risk of transmitting or contracting HIV from anal fingering is not very likely if there is no anal or rectal bleeding. The risk of spreading or contracting HIV from anal fingering is much lower than from vaginal fingering, anal-penile intercourse, or penile-vaginal intercourse. This is because HIV is spread through the exchange of certain bodily fluids via open cuts or mucous membranes. Unlike the genitals, fingers do not have mucous membranes; therefore, the only way to contract the virus via the finger would be from a cut or scratch. The only way to spread the virus via the finger would be through bleeding, or through touching fluids containing the virus before penetrating your partner. The vaginal secretions and semen of an infected person both contain HIV; however, the anus is not self-lubricating and thus does not produce fluid?so there is significantly less fluid exchange. That said, the lining of the rectum is very thin and delicate, much more than the lining of the vagina. Since it does not self-lubricate like the vagina, it can bleed much more easily. Avoiding anal bleeding is good practice, not only because it can hurt, but it can reduce your HIV risk, especially if you have a cut on your finger and/or if you don?t know your partner?s status or sexual history. Here are some tips to avoid bleeding from anal or rectal fingering:

- Clip and file fingernails very short.
- Wear latex or nitrile gloves, clip your nails, and wash and dry your hands before donning the gloves.
- Use plenty of water-based lubricant to prevent friction and tearing of the tissue. Some lubes are designed especially for anal play.
- If you like to keep your finger nails long, wear latex gloves and use cotton balls at the tips.
- Scrapes on your hands are not as concerning, but an open cut on your finger can definitely increase the chance of transmission of HIV or of some other STI. Consider waiting until it heals if there is any chance that either your partner(s) or you have HIV.
- Go slowly and start small. The anus and the rectum need to relax before you can
properly enjoy anal play. Follow the lead of your partner and stop if it hurts.

For more information about HIV/AIDS or other STIs, visit the Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs) section of the Go Ask Alice! archives.

Being cautious doesn’t mean you shouldn’t experiment. Anal fingering can be very pleasurable for any gender, but especially for a man because when done correctly, it can stimulate the prostate and result in an intense orgasm. However, be sure to remember that sexual play involving the anus includes risks of bacterial infection as well as STIs if fingers or toys aren’t washed properly before and afterwards, or if you don’t use a new condom before moving on to another body part. Be safe and have fun!

Bottoms up,

Alice!

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