Dear Alice,

Is it possible to get sick from oral sex, when your partner doesn't have any STD's? I've only ever had one partner, and recently I performed oral sex on him. Only ever since I have had a sore throat, and swollen glands. Is this related, or did I just pick up cold germs he was carrying?

— Sick

Answer

Dear Sick,

Whether it is related or not, having a sore throat and swollen glands can be a real drag. The symptoms you describe could be a common cold or strep throat [2], but they could also be caused by an infection you may have received during oral sex. It's possible that your partner may have a sexually transmitted infection (STI) without knowing it, and passed it on to you through fluids exchanged during oral sex. Some STIs are passed more easily during oral sex including herpes [3] and gonorrhea [4]. Yeast infections can also be spread to partners during oral sex (See Do I have thrush? [5] for more information). Oral STI symptoms may include:

- Sore throat
- Tonsillitis
- Oral lesions
- Cold sores
- Fever
- Swollen glands

There are ways to protect yourself and your partner from oral infections during sex including:

- Using a latex barrier, like a condom or dental dam
- Avoiding oral sex when one partner has open cuts or sores, or has recently gone to the dentist (you can have small cuts you may not be aware of)
- Avoiding using food products with a condom or dental dam because these can break down latex
It's a good idea to see a health care professional anytime you suspect that you may have an infection, or when cold symptoms last for more than a few days as an untreated infection can become serious. If you do have an infection, your health care professional may take a throat culture to find its cause. If it turns out that you have an STI, be sure to talk to your partner so he can get treated as well, even if he has no noticeable symptoms. Without treatment, your partner could give you the infection again, even if you have been treated.

Seeking help and information when you are concerned about something is always a good idea. After all, it's your health and well-being.

Take care,

Alice!
Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health

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Resources

Medical Services (Morningside)
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