Hi Alice,

I am sure this question of mine may sound stupid and you have been asked a number of times. However, for me, it is a very important question relating to my sexual life. My question is: does kissing, with sucking your partner's tongue and lips, transmit HIV? For me, sex without such kissing is no fun! Lately my girlfriend was told by someone that such kissing is risky, and therefore she refuses to give kisses during sex. Waiting anxiously for your reply.

Signed-
No kiss, no fun

Answer

Dear No kiss, no fun,

For many, kissing is one of the joys of life — plus kissing someone deeply is hot, hot, hot! And you want to be safe, as well. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers open-mouth kissing low-risk for transmitting HIV, especially if both partners are without sores or cuts on the mouth or lips. Saliva has certain proteins that make it an extremely poor carrier of HIV. As a result, kissing, sucking, and licking the lips, mouth, and tongue are basically safe.

Blood, however, is an ideal carrier for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and if anybody’s blood enters the equation (or a mouth), things can get more complicated. If an infected partner has blood in his or her mouth, an open-mouth kiss could lead to transmission of the virus through the other partner's mucous membrane lining the inside of the mouth. If the receiving partner has mouth or lip abrasions (i.e., serious gum disease, cuts, open sores, cold sores), the virus has a better chance of being transmitted. It is possible that extended periods of oral exploration can potentially damage the mouth and lips, causing such abrasions.

That being the case, you two may want to get tested to know your HIV status. Doing so will help you identify what choices you have and what decisions you can make regarding safety measures and lower-risk sexual activities. You may also want to see if there are other reasons behind your girlfriend's new or sudden no kissing during sex stance.
As long as you both are practicing safer sex, the risk of HIV transmission from other aspects of sex are minimal. Perhaps there is another reason your girlfriend is hesitant about kissing? Even though she refuses or chooses not to give kisses during sex, is she comfortable with kissing you at other times? Perhaps one of you may have chapped or split lips, cold sores, or even bad breath. But you won't know how she feels or what she is thinking unless you ask her, and let her know that you are eager to hear her perspective.

Although safer sex is not 100 percent safe, which is why it is called safer sex and not "safe" sex, using a condom or dam consistently and correctly helps reduce the risk of transmitting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Getting tested regularly and talking with understanding about the risks involved in whatever sexual behaviors you both choose to do can help ease both of your minds, and increase pleasure.

Alice!

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