Yeast infection (thrush) from oral sex? [1]

Dear Alice,

Can a guy get an infection if he has unprotected oral sex with a girl who has a yeast infection?

Signed,

Itchy mouth?

Answer

Dear Itchy mouth,

To answer your questions, yes, it’s possible to pass a yeast infection to a partner during unprotected oral sex. An irritated or itchy mouth is both uncomfortable and difficult to scratch, but there are ways to avoid getting into this predicament. The yeast Candida can cause yeast infections of the mouth, called thrush or oral thrush. Candida actually exists normally in the mouth and genital regions, but usually at low levels. When the level of Candida gets disturbed, either through passing yeast infections from the genital to the oral region, or due to a suppressed immune system, it can cause an itchy, sometimes painful discomfort. Symptoms of oral thrush include:

- White patches in the mouth and on the tongue
- White lesions that are sore and may bleed when scraped or brushed
- Difficulty swallowing, if thrush has spread to the esophagus

Tests for thrush may include a throat culture, and an endoscopic exam or barium swallow (if it has spread to the esophagus). If thrush is diagnosed, treatment typically includes an antifungal medicine, thorough oral hygiene, and salt water rinses. Recurring oral thrush can be a sign of an underlying medical condition, so it's important to see a health care professional if you are experiencing these symptoms, or if the yeast infection returns after treatment. Some studies suggest that yeast infections can be passed from males to females (not just vice versa) so if yeast infections continue to recur, both partners should get tested.

To prevent thrush, practice good oral hygiene and treat vaginal yeast infections early. Also, it's a
good idea to avoid having oral sex if one partner is feeling itchy or uncomfortable, or use condoms and dams to prevent the spread of Candida. There is also some evidence that eating a diet lower in carbohydrates and including yogurt containing acidophilus \[2\] can help prevent yeast infections.

Here's hoping that you and your partner stay itch-free,

Alice!

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Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) \[4\]
Yeast Infection \[5\]

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