# Staying Syphi-less

November 1, 2000 By Daniel Wolfe

As with HIV, using a condom or dental dam for oral and anal sex is the best prevention against syphilis, an STD on the rise among some people with HIV (see "The Secret Life of Syphilis"). For those of you who won't lick latex or who choose condomless contact with other HIVers, there are other ways to guard against grievous harm.

**THE FEWER, THE MERRIER.** "I always tell people my HIV status, and if they tell me they're positive, we have natural sex," says Dominic, a New York City HIVer. "But I do play a numbers game and cut down on my volume of partners." Syphilis, more infectious than other STDS such as gonorrhea, is particularly associated with number of partners.

**GET TESTY.** "I go in at least once a year for a syphilis test," says Kelly from Salt Lake. "And my doctor is good -- she asks things like 'Have you been to [syphilis outbreak city] Seattle lately?' If yes, she says, 'Syphilis test.'" If you're pregnant, make sure to get tested not only in the first trimester, as the law requires, but in the third as well; your first test might not have shown an infection you got at the same time -- or after -- you conceived.

**RISK IS ORAL, TOO.** It's not just President Clinton. Says North Carolina STD expert Peter Leone, MD: "When doctors ask if you've been sexually active, many people only think of intercourse." When it comes to contracting syphilis, lip service counts.

**LOOK BEFORE YOU LICK.** "I always give a partner the once-over," says Dominic. "And if I see something, I ask -- what's that?"

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