

## Semen swallowing is safe: Oral sex focus

Sir,

Oral sex refers to sexual activities involving the stimulation of the genitalia by the use of the mouth, tongue, teeth or throat. Oral sex is now very common in both heterosexual and homosexual couples, and oral sex may be practiced by people of all sexual orientations.<sup>[1]</sup> Fellatio refers to the stimulation of a man's penis by his partner's mouth, usually by licking or sucking.<sup>[1]</sup> Semen is an organic fluid, also known as seminal fluid, which usually contains spermatozoa. It is secreted by the gonads (sexual glands) and other sexual organs of the males or the hermaphroditic animals, and can fertilize female ova. Most semen is white, but grey or even yellowish semen can be normal as well. Blood in the semen can cause a pink or reddish color, known as hematospermia. Semen is composed of approximately (2–5%) 200–500 million spermatozoa, (65–75%) amino acids, citrate, enzymes, flavins, fructose, phosphorylcholine, prostaglandins, proteins, vitamin C, (25–30%) acid phosphatase, citric acid, fibrinolysin, prostate-specific antigen, proteolytic enzymes, zinc and (1%) galactose, mucus and sialic acid. Oral sex negates the risk of pregnancy,<sup>[2]</sup> and there is no pathway or scope for sperm from the penis to enter the uterus and fallopian tubes to fertilize an egg. Ingested sperm is killed and broken down by the acid in the stomach and the proteins in the small intestine. Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can be transmitted through oral sex with an infected partner. Examples of these STDs include HIV, herpes, syphilis, gonorrhoea, genital warts (human papillomavirus), intestinal parasites and hepatitis. Although oral sex is infrequently examined in research on adolescents, oral sex can transmit oral, respiratory and genital pathogens<sup>[3]</sup> and, in various acts of oral sex, there is a risk of infection because saliva, pre-cum, semen, vaginal secretions and menstrual blood can get into the mouth. The various channels in the oral cavity that serve as a gateway of entry of infection from the oral cavity to blood stream include any open sores, cuts, abrasions or bleeding gum disease (gingivitis, periodontitis) in the mouth through which the virus can get into the systemic circulation.<sup>[1]</sup> There are several ways to reduce the risks of oral sex. Generally, the use of a physical barrier during oral sex can reduce the risk of transmission of

HIV and other STDs. To reduce the risk of infection during unprotected oral sex, limit exposure to sexual fluids and ensure that no cuts or lesions are present in the mouth or on the genitals. A good oral health, free from bleeding gums, lip sores, cuts, broken skin and oral epithelium, enormously reduces the chances of transmission of infection among the partners indulging in oral sex. A periodic oral health check up is mandatory among the people frequently involved in oral sex and, thus, good oral hygiene is fundamental for oral integrity as it greatly affects the quality of life.<sup>[4]</sup> Thus, it can be inferred that swallowing semen is not harmful as long as the man is healthy.

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