



Risk of HIV from using the bathroom?

Question

Dear Alice,

I have been asked by my hairdresser about the risks of contracting HIV when using the facilities. What are the precautions one should take for this problem? Are there any scientific papers addressing this question?

—Miguel

Answer

Dear Miguel,

Quite the beauty salon conversation topic! While HIV is a serious infection, it is not a particularly strong virus when it is outside of a human body — which includes contact with bathroom fixtures. In fact, it can't live very long outside of an infected person. So, the answer to the question you've asked is that no precautions need to be taken to avoid the risk of HIV transmission when you're utilizing the lavatory. It's been well established that the HIV virus is transmitted in the following ways:

- **Bodily fluid exchange (i.e., semen, vaginal, or cervical fluids) with an infected person** —These fluids must enter an uninfected person's body through mucous membranes, cuts, or other openings (mucous membranes line the vagina, rectum, urethra, and the mouth)
- **Infected blood transmission** through intravenous, intramuscular, or subcutaneous injection (i.e., using infected needles)
- **From an infected mother to her baby** during pregnancy, during delivery, or through breastfeeding

That being said, **HIV is not transmitted via casual contact**. A person cannot transmit HIV through things like handshakes, hugs, or sharing a plate of nachos. The virus also cannot live or reproduce on inanimate objects, such as toilet seats or sinks. Additionally, contact with saliva, tears, or urine or bites from insects will not transmit the virus.

The only way a person could get HIV from "the facilities" is if s/he is having unprotected sex with an infected person in the bathroom, or if s/he has an open wound that comes into contact with the blood of an infected person when in the bathroom. For more information on HIV transmission, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website. The next time you're due for a trim, you can advise your stylist that s/he can use the facilities, as well as continue to cut hair, without risking HIV-infection.

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