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Ah this is the city of s...we mean love



Love behind the books?

# Sex and City College: Are You Having Safe Sex?

## 44% of City College Students Are Not

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Welcome backs students! As we come to a new start in the school year, I bring to your attention a topic that as college students we have all been faced with and if not yet, will soon be: SEX.

Sex and its etiquette in the social code have undergone many transformations throughout the last few decades. However, today more than ever, it is important that college students be informed of sex in the cadre of their social environment in order to make informed personal decisions when it comes to engaging in intimate relationships.

We live in a society where sex has increasingly lost its meaning. Today, notably on university campuses, sex is frequently reduced to the "one night hook-up" or what is now referred to as the "sex buddy." Although to many, these options offer minimal emotional investment, which may seem appealing initially, the truth is that these options do come with their set of detrimental consequences as well.

For starters, often these "hook-ups" occur under the influence of heavy drinking, which can lead to the possibility of risky encounters and sometimes even anonymous sex. After drinking, a person may be partially, or even very, intoxicated. Intoxication impairs

judgment and hinders individuals from comprehending the emotional and, more importantly, the health-related consequences of sex with an almost-total stranger. What can happen? No one would welcome sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as Herpes, Chlamydia, Syphilis, and Gonorrhea; and the contraction of more serious STDs such as HIV/AIDS. These are consequences of casual, unprotected sex.

In an informal survey called Sex and the City College (SACC), 100 students (50 male, 50 female) were surveyed as to their recent and general sexual habits, and attitudes toward casual sex. Questions ranged from number of partners, to students' practices of safe sex. Of the 86% who said that they were sexually active, a reported 44% did not use a condom the last time they had sex; 79% admitted to having unprotected sex at some point or another; 41% said that they have never been tested for HIV/AIDS (and other STDs), and 37% currently have multiple sexual partners. Shockingly, of those students who are involved with multiple partners, 38% have never been tested for HIV/AIDS.

Other interesting findings included students' perception on oral sex: 26% of all the students surveyed do not consider oral sex as an "actual" form of sex and thus 22% do not protect themselves when receiving or performing oral sex.

These findings, although distressing to a certain degree, are helpful in that they do make it clear that students are not protecting themselves as much as they should be, and may be misinformed of the severity of the consequences of unprotected sex—one sexual encounter can potentially harm your health (and that of your partners) and consequently the rest of your life.

One of the most devastating consequences of unprotected sex is to become infected with the HIV virus. HIV is an immune deficiency syndrome that gradually weakens the body's immune system, leaving it unable to fight off sickness, disease and opportunistic infections.

HIV is transmitted through the direct contact of semen (sperm), blood, vaginal fluid and preseminal fluid. The majority of HIV infections are acquired through unprotected sexual relations between partners, one of whom is infected with HIV. These sexual relations include vaginal intercourse as well as oral sex (insertive and receptive) and anal sex.

Once a person is HIV positive, it may take up to 10 years for symptoms to appear.

However, during this time, the body's immune system will gradually become weaker.

When the immune system's level of deterioration reaches a critical point, the final stage of the HIV virus will appear as symptoms of AIDS. Some symptoms associated with AIDS may include extreme fatigue, rapid weight loss with unknown causes, presence of painful swollen nodes in unusual locations, persistent diarrhea, high fever, high frequency of severe illnesses such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, cervical cancer etc., meningitis with possible mental deterioration, and death in a majority of cases.

In New York City, a poll found that 36% of New Yorkers used a condom the last time

they had sex, and that 26% had been tested for H.I.V. in the preceding 18 months. So the problem is not only present on our university campus but on a wider scale as well. In New York City alone, 143,401 people have been diagnosed with the AIDS virus (2002) and another estimated 62,540 people remain undiagnosed. This makes NYC the city with the highest AIDS case rate in the country. In 2002, 5,417 persons were diagnosed with HIV, 4,059 with AIDS, and 1,744 people died from HIV/AIDS related-cases.

The New York City Health Department encourages people to get tested for STDs in order to make informed decisions based on their current health status. They also encourage people to consult their website for any additional information pertaining to sexual education and prevention of contracting STDs ([www.nyc.gov/health](http://www.nyc.gov/health)).

Abstinence is one method of avoiding STDs and also happens to be the only 100% effective method of not contracting STDs. 14% of students polled favored abstinence as a means of sexual protection.

But if it is your choice to engage in sexual activities, safe sexual practices are heavily recommended by our city's health department and for college students, they probably should be mandatory.

Safe sex includes the use of condoms whenever engaging in sexual intercourse. Male condoms are 98% effective, but there are also female condoms that prove to be 80% effective. Safe sex also involves avoiding sexual intercourse with multiple partners or anyone with risky sexual practices.

Always remember that you can begin to adopt safe sexual practices today, no matter what your sexual history may be. It's all about making the choice.

Also, be honest with your partner(s) so they can make informed decisions about their sexual health.

It is important to keep in mind that even as college students, we are not immune from the harmful consequences that can come with casual sex. We live in the city with the highest HIV/AIDS rate in the nation, and must take a stand against becoming a part of that tragic statistic. Thus as college students, and the next generation of decision makers and leaders, we must take our health into our own hands and protect ourselves with the tools at our disposal.

Resources are available to engage in protected sex. The Wellness and Counseling Center (MR J-15) provides a large number of referrals to adolescent clinics that can test you for HIV free of charge. They also provide students with free NYC Condoms provided by the City of New York. What's more, there is ample information on new options for safe sex available to both males and females that weren't even conceivable a decade ago.

Bottom line: These days, protected sex should not just be an option, it should be a way of life. One that I hope you will consider strongly and choose to adopt. So the next time you

are faced with a sexual decision, stop (yes, in the heat of the moment) and think first about how this one choice would affect your health. Furthermore, consider how your sexual lifestyle will affect your future and the rest of your life.  
(Check out these facts on the NYC Health Department website, [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health))

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