

Sexual Health

TO SHAVE OR NOT TO SHAVE

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We're not talking legs and underarms – we're talking pubic hair. Some people like the look or feel of it. Some people shave because they find it more “hygienic”. There are cultures where both men and women shave their pubic hair. Pubic hair seems to come and go as a fashion trend.

Pubic Hair

Human beings probably developed pubic hair for two reasons: to show who was mature for mating; and to trap sexual smells. Some people shave, some wax and some use creams. Hair removal creams should not be used for places covered by underwear – the skin is too delicate. If you decide to remove your pubic hair, there are pros and cons to both waxing and shaving. If you get an unusual bump or sore on or around your genitals, see a health care provider to make sure it's not just from hair removal.

Bumps

Sometimes shaving pubic hair causes “razor bumps” (ingrown hairs). If you notice bumps where you shaved, you may worry you have warts or herpes. Sometimes you do; but sometimes it's just a shaving problem. Waxing prevents razor bumps.

Irritation leading to infection from your own body

No matter which way you remove pubic hair, it can cause some irritation. Folliculitis, which looks like an ingrown hair with pus, can be caused by irritation from a razor. Irritation means there are tiny openings in the skin. This makes it easier for bacteria or viruses to get in. Sometimes a person already has a sexually transmitted infection (STI) like warts or molluscum contagiosum. Molluscum looks like a bump with a dent in it. It is spread from skin-to-skin contact or from hot tubs. The irritation from shaving or waxing can allow these types of viruses to spread to other parts of your skin. The molluscum virus especially moves easily from one spot to another. When an infection spreads, it can be harder to get rid of.

Irritation leading to infection from someone else

If your skin is irritated, it makes it easier to get an infection from another person. If your partner has warts or genital herpes, irritation makes it easier for you to get these infections from them.

Never share a razor!

Another problem is the possibility of infection by sharing razors. If a person has hepatitis B and shares their razor, they can pass on the virus to another person. If you live with other people (even family), don't leave your razor in the shower. This will make sure it can't be used and spread infection.

For shaving avoid:

- dull razors
- shaving dry, unprepared skin (use soap or a shaving gel)
- sexual contact for 48 hours after shaving. This may be a bit difficult if you are shaving every few days.

For waxing avoid:

- wax that is too hot
- sexual contact for 48 hours after waxing

Waxing in a salon

Salons are required to follow public health guidelines. For example, all reusable equipment/instruments must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected or sterilized after each use. When a salon uses cosmetic products (including wax, cream or lotion) they have to make sure nothing from the last client (like a virus or bacteria) stays in the jar and can infect you. It's best if the salon uses single-use disposable sticks when waxing. “Double dipping” into the wax pot by is not permitted by public health guidelines. Reusable spatulas for waxing can be used if the amount of wax to be used is dispensed from the original wax pot and leftover wax is discarded. These reusable spatulas must also be cleaned and disinfected between clients.

Remember that the temperature of heated wax is not hot enough to kill viruses or bacteria. You can also check with your local public unit if the salon is inspected and if you have any questions.

Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit.