What is a Dental Dam?

Dental dams are small, thin, square pieces of latex or polyurethane that are used for oral-vaginal or oral-anal sex. They acquire their name from their use in dental procedures. Dental dams help to reduce the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) during oral sex by acting as a barrier to vaginal and anal secretions that contain bacteria and viruses. They come in a variety of sizes and flavors, so you can find a dam that satisfies your tastes. It is also possible to create your own dental dam (see below).

Benefit in Sexual Health

Because dental dams act as a barrier to body fluids, they help reduce STI transmission. Many sexually transmitted infections, such as herpes, genital warts and HIV can be passed through the secretions in oral sex. Like condoms, dental dams must be used correctly and consistently in order to be effective. Although it may seem a little awkward to use at first, dental dams are extremely easy to use.

How Do I Use a Dental Dam?

- Before using the dam you may wish to rinse off any powder that’s on the dam and check for any holes or perforations.
- The partner performing oral sex will hold the dam against the vulva or anus of the receiving partner (you can choose to apply lubricant on the vulva or anus before using the dam; just make sure that the lube is water-based, because oil-based lubricants and lotions such as Vaseline will degrade the latex and decrease the dam’s effectiveness).
- When you use the dental dam, be sure to use only one side. **DO NOT** flip the dam over and risk exposure to the very fluids you are trying to avoid.
- If you move from vaginal to anus or vice-versa, be sure to use a new dental dam each time. Movement from one body part to another can transfer germs. Also, be sure to dispose of the dental dam after each use. Do not re-use the dam.

Won't Using a Dental Dam Diminish the Whole Experience of Oral Sex?

Many people believe that using a dam will nullify the enjoyment of oral sex. That’s not how it has to be! Granted, the feeling of latex will be different than a tongue, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. Using a dental dam with water-based lube can offer your partner a new type of stimulation. Although oral sex is considered less risky than vaginal or anal sex, there is still a risk of transmitting STIs. To be as safe as possible, use a dental dam for every act of oral sex.

How Can I Make My Own Dental Dam?

If you do not have a dental dam readily accessible, you can make one out of a male or female condom, latex glove, or non-microwavable plastic wrap. To make a dental dam out of a male condom, simply cut the tip off of a non-lubricated condom and cut down one side. If using a
female condom, cut off the ring and then cut down one side to make a rectangle. To create a
dental dam out of a latex glove, cut off the finger and then cut down one side. If using plastic
wrap, be aware that it should be non-microwavable due to the pores in microwavable wrap
are large enough to allow viruses and bacteria to pass through.

Where Can I Get Dental Dams?

You can get regular dental dams and non-latex dental dams along with multiple varieties of
condoms, lubricant, finger cots, female condoms and other sexual health information and
resources in the Health Promotion Office (Room 337) at OSU Student Health Services, Monday
through Friday, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.