

# HIV & sexually transmitted infections

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be transmitted via unprotected sexual intercourse and intimate skin-to-skin contact.

You can protect yourself by using condoms and having regular sexual health check-ups.

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## What are STIs?

- ✓ STIs are caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites.
- ✓ STIs are most commonly spread through unprotected vaginal, anal and oral sex, and sharing sex toys.
- ✓ Skin-to-skin genital contact can also spread some STIs such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, HPV, herpes, genital warts, pubic lice and chlamydia.

## How can I prevent STIs?



Using condoms and dental dams makes sex safer and prevents many STIs (but not all).



Remember to cover sex toys with a condom too (one for each partner) and wash toys after use.



Going for regular sexual health check-ups will mean you can get prompt treatment.

## STIs & HIV

Some STIs can cause sores that increase the risk of HIV transmission ...

- ✓ ... to you if you are HIV-negative
- ✓ ... from you if you are HIV-positive and not on treatment.



If you're living with HIV and also have an STI, your viral load is likely to increase which will make you more likely to pass on HIV if you have sex without a condom.

If you have an undetectable viral load, there's no evidence that an STI will make you more likely to pass on HIV.



## STI symptoms

Many people who have an STI experience no symptoms. Others may experience:

- ✓ sores/soreness
- ✓ unusual lumps
- ✓ itching
- ✓ pain when urinating or defecating
- ✓ unusual discharge from the genitals.

If you notice any sores or other symptoms:

- ✓ See a healthcare professional as soon as possible.
- ✓ Do not have sex or other sexual activities until you have had a sexual health check-up.

Remember that symptoms may not appear for several weeks after infection.



## When to get a sexual health check

As many people will have no STI symptoms, the best way to look after your health if you are sexually active is to have:

- ✓ regular sexual health check-ups
- ✓ a check-up before and after unprotected sex or sexual activities with a new partner.

Seek immediate medical care if you notice symptoms that might be STIs.



If you test positive for one STI you should get tested for other STIs.



If left untreated, some STIs can have serious consequences such as infertility.



## Testing for STIs

You cannot diagnose an STI by yourself as symptoms vary from person to person. Only a healthcare professional can diagnose an STI.



Having a sexual health check-up can involve various tests, such as a:

- genital examination
- genital or oral swab for bacteria
- urine sample
- blood test.



Some test results can be generated straight away, and will be given to you at the clinic. Other results will take up to two weeks.



## Get STIs treated

Most STIs can be cured with the correct treatment. A few cannot be cured, but can be managed with treatment. If you have an STI, getting treatment early will help to avoid health risks to yourself and others.

Antibiotics or creams cure many STIs.



Longer lasting infections are managed by other treatments, such as antiviral drugs for Hepatitis C.



Inform any recent sexual partners of an STI diagnosis so they can get tests.



### Chlamydia

- **Transmission:** contact with semen or vaginal fluid.
- **Symptoms:** unusual discharge, pain when urinating, abdominal pain, pain in rectum, pain during sex and/or bleeding after sex (women), bleeding between periods and/or heavier periods, pain and/or swelling in the testicles.
- **Diagnosis:** swab or urine sample.
- **Treatment:** antibiotics.

### Genital warts

- **Transmission:** touching and licking a partner's anus, touching used condoms or sex toys, sharing needles and syringes, unsterilised tattoo, body-piercing or medical/dental equipment.
- **Symptoms:** white or flesh coloured bumps around genital area that may be itchy, itching or bleeding from your genitals or anus.
- **Diagnosis:** visible to the eye.
- **Treatment:** medical removal of the warts.

### Gonorrhoea

- **Transmission:** unusual discharge, pain when urinating, pain in the lower abdomen, bleeding between periods and/or heavier periods, swelling of the foreskin.
- **Diagnosis:** swab or urine sample.
- **Treatment:** antibiotics.

### Hepatitis

- **Transmission:** touching and licking a partner's anus, touching used condoms or sex toys, sharing needles and syringes, unsterilised tattoo, body-piercing or medical/dental equipment. **Hep A** – contaminated food, contaminated water, close contact.
- **Symptoms:** flu-like illness, nausea, loss of appetite, diarrhea, abdominal pain, jaundice, dark urine, pale faeces.
- **Diagnosis:** blood test.
- **Treatment:** Hepatitis A – virus clears on its own. Hepatitis B – virus clears on its own or antiviral drugs needed. Hepatitis C – antiviral drugs.

- KEY**
- genital contact
  - vaginal sex without a condom
  - anal sex without a condom

- oral sex without a condom
- sharing sex toys

### Herpes

- **Transmission:** any contact with sore.
- **Symptoms:** sores around genital area or mouth that are painful, itchy or tingle, pain when urinating, unusual vaginal discharge, feeling unwell with aches, pains and flu-like symptoms.
- **Diagnosis:** physical examination, genital or oral swab.
- **Treatment:** antiviral drugs if the infection doesn't clear on its own.

### Human papilloma virus (high-risk HPV)

- **Transmission:** genital warts are symptoms of low-risk HPV (see above). Cancer causing or high-risk HPV produces no symptoms.
- **Diagnosis:** **Women** – genital HPV testing is often a part of cervical screening, which checks for abnormal cells on the cervix (entrance to the womb). **Men** – there's currently no reliable test for HPV infection.
- **Treatment:** if a cervical screening test shows you have abnormal cells on the cervix, it may be necessary to remove them so that they don't develop into cancer.

### Syphilis

- **Transmission:** direct contact with an infected sore or rash, sharing needles and syringes.
- **Symptoms:** ulcers, sores, rash, swollen glands.
- **Diagnosis:** blood test or swab from a sore.
- **Treatment:** injection of antibiotics.

### Trichomoniasis

- **Transmission:** unusual discharge, pain when urinating, soreness, swelling and itching around genital area, pain in the lower stomach.
- **Diagnosis:** genital swab.
- **Treatment:** antibiotics.

## Common STIs