



Sexually Transmissible Infections....

Sexually Transmissible Infections

Sexually transmissible infections (STIs) are common all around the world. They may be caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites. You may think that only other people get STIs and that you are not at risk of catching one, but anybody who is sexually active can be infected if they do not practice safe sex. You can't tell just by looking at a person that they have an STI. If you have unprotected sex with a person infected with an STI, you are at high risk of catching that infection.

Sexually transmissible infections include chlamydia, herpes, gonorrhoea, syphilis, genital herpes, scabies, pubic lice (crabs), hepatitis and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

It is recommended that you talk to your doctor about having a check-up, even if you do not have any signs or symptoms of an STI.

The symptoms can vary

There are many different STIs and there are many signs that mean you may have caught one. Sometimes there are no signs at all. Common symptoms can include:

- Unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- Pain during sex or urination
- Sores, blisters, ulcers, warts or rashes in the genital area
- Itchiness or irritation in the genital area
- Persistent diarrhoea.
- Fever, flu-like symptoms.

STIs are passed on during sex

The most common sexual activities that can spread an STI from one partner to another include:

- **Vaginal sex** – the man's penis in the woman's vagina.
- **Anal sex** – the man's penis in the partner's anus (the partner can be either male or female).
- **Oral sex** – the man's penis in the partner's mouth, or the partner's mouth or tongue in the woman's vagina.
- **Oral-anal sex** – one partner's mouth or tongue on the other partner's anus.

Type of help available

Many STIs are easily treated once they are diagnosed. Treatments for the different types of infections can include:

- Bacteria – antibiotics, either one high dose or a course
- Parasites – medicated shampoos
- Viruses – there are no cures for viral STIs. In most cases, there are treatments to help control the symptoms.

Reference: Victorian Government Better Health Channel website .

Chlamydia

What is chlamydia and how do you get it?

Chlamydia is the most common bacterial STI. You get it from having sex with an infected person. Babies can get it from their mothers during childbirth. Although most infected people have no symptoms, they can still pass on chlamydia.

Am I safe if I only have oral or anal sex?

Chlamydia can also be passed during oral or anal sex.

What happens if I'm infected?

If you are like most people, you will have no symptoms at all. On the other hand, you could have symptoms such as pain when going to the bathroom or a "discharge" coming from your penis or vagina. If you are a female, you may have abdominal pain. This could be from pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), caused by chlamydia. PID can interfere with your ability to get pregnant. Chlamydia also increases your chance of getting HIV.

How do you treat chlamydia?

Chlamydia can be treated with antibiotics. Delayed treatment can result in serious problems. Both you and your partner must be treated.

Genital Herpes

What is genital herpes and how do you get it?

Genital herpes is the most common viral STI. It is caused by the herpes simplex virus. One in six people over the age of 12 in the US are infected with herpes. You get it from having sex with an infected person, and babies can get it from their mothers during childbirth. Although most infected people have no symptoms, they can still pass on herpes.

Am I safe if I only have oral or anal sex?

Herpes can also be passed during oral or anal sex.

What happens if I'm infected?

If you are like most people, you will have no symptoms at all. On the other hand, you could have symptoms such as painful outbreaks of blisters, sores or ulcers. You can also have pain and burning while urinating. Genital herpes infection also increases your chance of getting HIV.

How do you treat genital herpes?

Once you get herpes, you always have herpes. There is no cure. However, some medicines can reduce your symptoms.

Gonorrhea

What is gonorrhea and how do you get it?

Gonorrhea is the second most common bacterial STI. You get it from having sex with an infected person. Babies can get it from their mothers during childbirth. Although most infected people have no symptoms, they can still pass on gonorrhea.

Am I safe if I only have oral or anal sex?

Gonorrhea can also be passed during oral or anal sex.

What happens if I'm infected?

If you are like most people, you will have no symptoms at all. On the other hand, you could have symptoms such as pain when going to the bathroom or a "discharge" coming from the penis or vagina. If you are a female, you may have abdominal pain. This could be from pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), caused by gonorrhea. PID can interfere with your ability to get pregnant. Untreated infection can damage your joints, heart or brain. Gonorrhea also increases your chance of getting HIV.

How do you treat gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea can be treated with antibiotics. Delayed treatment can result in serious problems. Both you and your partner must be treated.

HPV - Human Papillomavirus

What is HPV and how do you get it?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common viral STI. You get HPV from having sex with an infected person. You can also get it from just "fooling around." Babies can get it from their mothers during childbirth. Although most infected people have no symptoms, they can still pass on HPV.

Am I safe if I only have oral or anal sex?

HPV can also be passed during oral or anal sex.

What happens if I'm infected?

If you are like most people, you will have no symptoms at all. Some people with HPV have warts. These are usually in the genital area. People with HPV can get cervical, penile or anal cancer. Babies who get the infection from their mothers can get warts in their throats.

How do you treat HPV?

Most people with HPV infection clear it on their own. However, some people will go on to develop warts or cancer. Although warts can be treated, they may return. For females, a Pap test can detect changes caused by HPV before they turn into cancer. Abnormal Pap tests and cervical cancer can be treated. The earlier you are treated, the more likely you are to be cured. All sexually active females should talk to a doctor about when to start having regular Pap tests.

Is there anything else I can do to reduce my chance of getting infected?

HPV vaccine is recommended for young women. However, vaccination does not protect against all types of HPV that cause cancer and warts. How long it works is unknown.

Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B and how do you get it?

Hepatitis B is a serious viral STI that affects the liver. Because it is transmitted through blood and body fluids, you can get it from having sex or sharing needles with an infected person. Babies can get it from their mothers during pregnancy. Although many infected people have no symptoms, they can still pass on hepatitis B.

Am I safe if I only have oral or anal sex?

Hepatitis B can also be passed during anal sex. Because the virus that causes hepatitis B can be found in saliva and other body fluids, it may be possible to pass hepatitis B during oral sex.

What happens if I'm infected?

You may have no symptoms at all. On the other hand, you could have symptoms such as weakness, loss of appetite and nausea. Your skin or eyes could look yellow. Although most people get over their hepatitis B infections, some people have it for life. Life-long infection can cause liver damage, cancer and death.

How do you treat hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B can be treated with medication. But treatment is expensive, has side effects and only works for some people. Your baby needs a special vaccination if you have hepatitis B and you are pregnant.

Is there anything else I can do to reduce my chance of getting infected?

Hepatitis B vaccine is very effective. It is recommended for all children and household contacts of people with life-long infections. It is also recommended for people who shoot drugs as well as males who have sex with males.

For more information: www.health.vic.gov.au

HIV/AIDS

What is HIV/AIDS and how do you get it?

HIV is a virus that invades the immune system and slowly destroys it. This reduces your ability to fight off infections and cancer. Without treatment, people with HIV develop AIDS, which is fatal. You get HIV from having sex with an infected person. Most infected people have no symptoms. But, even without symptoms, they can pass on HIV. You can also get HIV from contact with infected blood. Your risk is greatly increased if you have multiple sex partners or shoot drugs. Babies can get it from their mothers during pregnancy. You can't get HIV from casual contact such as shaking hands or hugging.²

Am I safe if I only have oral or anal sex?

Anal sex is extremely risky for passing HIV. HIV can probably be passed during oral sex.

What happens if I'm infected?

At first, you may just have brief flu-like symptoms (tiredness, fever, aches). You may have no other symptoms for years. Even with no symptoms, you can still pass on the disease during sex. If you go on to get AIDS, you may get cancers or multiple infections that other people fight off easily.

How do you treat HIV/AIDS?

If you have HIV, you can prolong your life by taking daily medicine for the rest of your life. However, the drugs are expensive and have significant side effects. If you are pregnant, there are very good drugs to reduce your baby's chance of getting HIV. You should also talk to your doctor about other precautions for your baby.

For more information: www.afao.org.au

Syphilis

What is syphilis and how do you get it?

Syphilis is a bacterial STI. You get it from having sex with an infected person. You usually get it through contact with sores or infected patches. These can be on the genitals or sometimes even on the mouth. Babies can get it from their mothers during pregnancy. Most infected people don't notice any symptoms, but they can still pass on syphilis.

Am I safe if I only have oral or anal sex?

Syphilis can also be passed during oral or anal sex.

What happens if I'm infected?

Syphilis symptoms are often similar to those of other diseases. At first, you may get a painless sore for a few weeks. If you don't get treatment, your syphilis will get worse. Next, you may feel like you have the flu. At this point, you may notice a rash. If you still don't get treated, syphilis can cause blindness, brain damage, heart damage and death. If you are pregnant, you can have a miscarriage or a stillborn baby. A baby born with syphilis can have serious birth defects. Syphilis also increases your chance of getting HIV.

How do you treat syphilis?

Syphilis can be treated with antibiotics. However, they will not repair any damage already done. Delayed treatment can result in serious problems. Both you and your partner must be treated.

Trichomoniasis

What is trichomoniasis and how do you get it?

Trichomoniasis is a very common STI. It is caused by a parasite. You get it from having sex with an infected person. Babies can get it from their mothers during childbirth. Although most infected people have no obvious symptoms, they can still pass on trichomoniasis. Trichomoniasis can live in the body for many years unnoticed if it isn't diagnosed and treated.

What happens if I'm infected?

If you are like most people, you may have no symptoms at all. Not all women notice symptoms but some women may

notice:

- a frothy yellow-green vaginal discharge
- an unpleasant vaginal odour
- vaginal itching or burning sensation
- pain during sex

Most men have no noticeable symptoms but some men may notice a discharge from the penis and burning sensation when urinating.

Trichomoniasis infection can be associated with premature births and also increases the risk of HIV infection.

If you are pregnant, you could have a premature baby. Trichomoniasis also increases your chance of getting HIV.

How do you treat trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis can be treated with antibiotics. Both you and your partner must be treated.

References: The Medical Institute for Sexual Health and New South Wales Government Department of Health factsheets.

For more information visit: www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/sexualhealth/trichomoniasis.htm