

Sexually Transmitted Infections

What are Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)?

- An STI is an infection (bacteria, parasite, or virus) that passes from one person to another through sexual contact.
- People cannot create an STI on their own. Just like a cold or the flu, one person must already have an STI for it to pass to someone else.
- A person can have more than one STI at the same time.

How are STIs transmitted?

- STIs are transmitted through sexual contact, sharing needles, or skin-to-skin contact with an infected area.
- Some STIs spread through sex fluids (cum, pre-cum, vaginal fluid or anal fluid) mixing between partners.
- Some STIs spread by touching an infected area of the skin.
- Some STIs spread by sharing needles, pipes, straws/bills when using drugs, tattoo or piercing equipment, or by sharing sex toys.
- Some STIs can be passed from an infected person to a baby during pregnancy and childbirth.

Can STIs be cured?

- Some STIs are curable, which means that after taking medication, like an antibiotic, a person no longer has the infection (but could get it again if re-exposed).
- Some STIs are treatable, which means that a person has it for the rest of their life, but takes medication to stay healthy and well.
- People with a treatable STI can have healthy sex lives, but may take extra steps to look after their health and the health of their partner(s).
- A few STIs have vaccines to prevent infection. A vaccine will not cure an infection if someone was already exposed, it only prevents one from happening.

Curable STIs:

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Pubic Lice
- Syphilis
- Trichomoniasis (Trich)
- Hepatitis C

Treatable STIs:

- HIV
- Herpes
- Hepatitis B (a vaccine is available)
- Human Papilloma Virus/Genital Warts (a vaccine is available to prevent the more common strains of this STI)

How do I know if I have an STI?

- Often STIs have no signs or symptoms. The only way to know is to get tested.

Signs of an STI:

- Skin Changes: Bumps, lumps, rash, or sores around the vagina, penis, or anus.
- Irritation When Peeing: Burning or discomfort. Feeling like you really need to pee but only a little comes out.
- Genital Itching: Ongoing itching around the vagina, penis or anus.
- Noticeable Pelvic Pain: Dull aches or cramps around the pelvic area.

- Sex Organ Discharge: Changes in discharge from your vagina, penis, or anus including a different smell, colour, or texture or having discharge when you normally wouldn't.

A person with an STI may experience no signs, or several together. If you are sexually active see your health care provider or visit a community clinic for an STI test.

How do I prevent STIs?

- Use safer sex supplies (condoms and sex dams).
- Get tested for STIs regularly (every 6 months or with new partners).
- Don't share needles, pipes, straws/bills, tattoo or piercing equipment, or sex toys.

Safer Sex Supplies:

Barriers can be used to prevent direct contact with another person's body and/or sex fluids. For penis-vagina or penis-anus sex you can use lubricated condoms. Condoms can also be put over sex toys to prevent STI transmission. For sex involving fingers, wear a latex surgical glove and avoid moving hands between bodies.

For oral sex, using condoms or a sex dam (square of latex) decreases the risk of getting an STI. A condom on the penis or a sex dam against the anus or the vulva (outside vagina) prevents contact with body fluids. If you do not have a sex dam, you can make one from a condom. Carefully cut the condom from the rim to the centre of the tip and unroll it. Spread it open with both hands and place it over the area of contact, so your mouth doesn't directly touch the other person's body part.

Use New Needles:

You can get harm reduction supplies like new needles from community health centres, services like Street Connections (Winnipeg) or SERC Brandon, and many community resource centres. If you get a tattoo or piercing, it is safest to go to a licensed shop. Do not share tattoo ink or ink wells.

How can I be tested for an STI?

STI tests are available from your health care provider, community health centres, Teen Clinics (if you are 21 or under) and many walk-in clinics. STI tests are free and confidential. Testing may include:

- Peeing in a cup. Avoid peeing for 1-2 hours before the test.
- A blood sample.
- A swab of the mouth, anus, or of any sores around the genitals.
- A visual exam of the genital area.

Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse. If you need a regular health care provider, call the Family Doctor Finder at 204-786-7111.
- From the Facts of Life Online: e-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.
- From a Teen Clinic if you are 21 or younger.
- Online at www.serc.mb.ca or our youth website, www.teentalk.ca.