

Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections

What are Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBIs)

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

How are STBBIs transmitted?

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

Can STBBIs be cured?

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

Curable STBBIs:

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

Treatable STBBIs:

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

How do I know if I have an STBBI?

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

Signs of an STBBI:

- 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.

You may have no signs or several together. If you are sexually active see your healthcare provider or visit a community clinic for an STBBI test.

How do I prevent STBBIs?

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

Safer Sex Supplies:

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

If you have oral sex, using condoms or a sex dam (square of latex) decreases the risk of getting an STBBI. 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 Connection (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. Don't share tattoo ink or ink wells.

PrEP:

Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is an effective HIV prevention medication. It is an antiretroviral (anti-HIV) drug that helps prevent HIV when taken by HIV-negative people. PrEP is available as a prescription from your doctor or local community clinics. It is only for HIV prevention.

How can I be tested for an STBBI?

STBBI tests are available from your health care provider, community health centres, Teen Clinics (if you are 21 or under) and many walk-in clinics. STBBIs 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 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 healthcare provider, call the Family Doctor Finder at 204-786-7111.
- From the Facts of Life (SERC): 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