

What are STIs?

STIs, or sexually transmitted infections, are spread through having unprotected sex with someone who has an STI.

How do you get STIs?

- By having unprotected sex and coming into contact with sexual fluids (semen, pre-ejaculate and vaginal fluid) and the surfaces of the penis, vulva, rectum and mouth.
- Through all kinds of sexual contact (anal, oral and vaginal). All sexual contact that involves bodily fluids should be considered risky.
- The use of condoms does decrease your risk of getting STIs but is not 100% safe, because even with a condom you can still come into contact with infectious areas of the genitals.
- HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS, is also an STI and it can also be spread through blood and breast milk.

Only herpes can be spread through mouth to mouth kissing.

How do I protect myself from STIs?

- In the early stages you cannot see the signs of STIs. But even if you can't see them they are infectious and can be passed to others.
- You can protect yourself and your partner from STIs, including HIV, if you use a condom each time and for every round of sex (vaginal or anal).
- You can also get an STI from unprotected oral sex (blow job or licking the vagina).

Signs and symptoms

If you have any of the following you should consult a health care worker as soon as possible:

- Unusual discharge from vagina, penis or anus.
- Itchy genitals.
- Pain when urinating.
- Pain during sexual intercourse.
- Genital sores.
- Swollen glands in the groin.
- Lower abdominal pain.
- Rashes and warts.



Treatment of STIs (other than HIV)

- Most STIs (other than HIV) can be cured with antibiotics.
- The earlier you go to the clinic and get treated the easier it will be to cure the infection.
- Always finish all the medicine you are given even if it looks like the infection has gone.
- If you stop taking your medicine before it is finished, the infection may come back.
- Never share your medicines as this will mean that neither you nor the other person will have enough treatment in your system to cure the STI.
- Some people might consult a traditional healer – you need to also visit your doctor.

What is the relationship between STIs and HIV?

- HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is an STI.
- The biggest problem with STIs is that they increase the chances of you getting HIV.
- If you or your sexual partner have an STI and HIV, the chances of passing on or getting HIV increase dramatically.
- Many STIs make little cuts, tears or breaks in the skin. If your partner is HIV-positive, the HIV can enter your body through these breaks in the skin during sex.
- The discharges from any STI may contain a very high concentration of HIV.

How you get HIV

The virus is spread through all kinds of sexual contact (vaginal, anal and oral), blood to blood contact and from mother to child through body fluids such as blood, vaginal fluids and breast milk.

Anyone who has unprotected sex can get HIV but you are at high risk if you:

- Have more than one sexual partner.
- Use alcohol and drugs as this lowers inhibitions and increases risky sexual behaviour.
- Are in a relationship where money or goods are exchanged for sex as they may not want to use condoms.
- Have other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Use drugs and share needles with others.
- Have rough or dry sex, which can cause cuts and bleeding. This allows the virus to pass into your body more easily.



Why is HIV testing important?

- When you are HIV infected you do not get sick right away, which means that you can spread HIV for many years before you come to know your HIV status.
- You can't see when someone has HIV; only testing will tell you this.
- Just like diabetes and high blood pressure, HIV can be managed through healthy living and taking treatment. Treatment will work better if you take it at the right time and do not wait until you are very sick.
- By taking the test you are taking control of your health and your life.
- Testing for HIV is a way of showing love and respect for your partner, yourself and your loved ones.

Everyone should know their status so that they can look after their own health and protect other people in their lives.

For more information: www.hivsa.com



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What YOU need to know about...

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

