
Get the facts about...

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Different Types of STIs

Bacterial Infections

A bacterial infection is caused when bacteria is spread through vaginal, oral or anal sexual contact with an infected person. These infections can be cured and are usually treated with antibiotics.

Examples of bacterial infections are:

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- LGV (Lymphogranuloma Venereum)
- Syphilis

Viral Infections

A viral infection can be spread during vaginal, anal or oral sexual contact. Some viruses can also be spread through direct contact with infected skin or by infected body fluids such as blood, semen or vaginal fluid entering into the bloodstream. Viral infections are not curable. For some viral STIs, medications can be taken to slow the progression of the virus or help ease pain or discomfort.

Examples of viral infections are:

- Genital Warts (HPV-Human Papillomavirus)
- Hepatitis B (a vaccine is available to prevent this)
- Herpes
- HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

Parasitic Infections

Parasites can be transferred by sexual contact or through contact with towels or sheets.

Examples of parasitic infections are:

- Pubic lice
- Trichomoniasis

Pubic lice are treated with lotion and shampoo. Trichomoniasis is cured with oral medication.

How Can I Get an STI?

- A sexually transmitted infection (STI) is passed through vaginal, oral, or anal sex. The bacteria or viruses that cause infection can travel in blood, semen and vaginal fluid.
- There are parasites that can be passed through sexual contact or infected sheets or towels.
- Some STIs can be spread to others by sharing needles and syringes.
- An infected woman may pass some STIs to her baby during pregnancy and childbirth. HIV can be transmitted in breast milk.
- Some STI's are spread by skin-to-skin contact.
- A person can have more than one STI at a time.

How do I know if I have an STI?

You may have an STI and have **NO** symptoms, or you may have very obvious symptoms. It may be difficult to know if you have an STI because you may or may not experience symptoms. It is important for you to be aware of changes in your body and health. Some symptoms could be:

- Different, or heavier, or foul smelling discharge from your vagina
- Discharge from your penis
- Bleeding during urination (peeing)
- Irregular periods
- A burning feeling during urination (peeing)
- Not being able to pee at all (feeling a need to pee then only ending up with a trickle)
- Sores or blisters, particularly in your genital or anal area (around your vagina, penis or anus)
- Irritation and itching around your genitals or anus
- Swelling (e.g. testicles)
- Development of a rash
- Pelvic pain

You may have only one symptom at a time or several together, or none at all.

Having any of these symptoms does not necessarily mean that you have an STI. **If you are sexually active, see a health professional for STI testing.**

Can I get an STI through oral sex?

Yes. Unprotected oral sex increases the risk of getting an STI for both partners, regardless of who is giving or receiving. Protect yourself by using a condom or oral dam during oral sex.

STIs that can be transmitted through unprotected oral sex include: Chlamydia, Genital Warts (HPV), Gonorrhea, Hepatitis A (via oral/anal contact), Hepatitis B, Herpes, HIV, LGV, and Syphilis.

Some symptoms of an oral sex STI may include:

- A sore throat
- Oral sores (around or in your mouth)
- Tonsillitis

What can I do to prevent getting an STI?

Abstinence

The only sure way to prevent getting an STI is not to have sexual activity like oral, anal or vaginal sex. There is no vaccination to safeguard against contracting most STIs. There are vaccines to prevent contracting Hepatitis B and some types of HPV.

Use condoms

If you do have intercourse, use a male condom or a female condom every time. Use a condom or an oral dam for oral sex. To make an oral dam, take a condom, snip through the rim and unroll. Spread open with both hands and place over area of contact (i.e. vagina, anus). Condoms only protect the skin they cover. If someone has herpes, HPV (warts), or syphilis sores or rash on parts of their genitals not covered by a condom, the virus can spread to another person's skin.

Talk to your partner(s)

Talk about safer sex practices with your partner when you're both relaxed. Protect yourselves and each other by using condoms, oral dams, or safe behaviours.

Get tested and have regular check-ups

If you are having sex, even if you have no symptoms of an STI, have a medical check-up at least once a year to make sure you do not have an infection.

How can I be tested for an STI?

- Testing may include a visual inspection, a blood sample, a urine sample, and a swab (like a Q-tip) taken from sores or genitals.
- If you test positive for an STI you may be asked about previous sexual contacts in order for those people to receive treatment as well.
- All information is confidential and private.
- Testing is free.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information from your public health nurse, community health clinic, doctor or pharmacist. To talk about birth control, sexuality, relationships, STIs and pregnancy options call:

Facts of Life Line at 947-9222 in Winnipeg or toll-free in Manitoba at 1-800-432-1957

AIDS/STI Information Line: 945-AIDS (2437) in Winnipeg or toll-free in Manitoba at 1-800-782-2437

You can also check out this website: www.serc.mb.ca