



Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Sexually transmitted infections are generally acquired by sexual contact. The bacteria, viruses or parasites that cause sexually transmitted diseases may pass from person to person in blood, semen, or vaginal and other bodily fluids.



STIs may have no symptoms. When they do, symptoms may include:

- Sores or bumps on genitals, or in the oral or rectal area
- Painful or burning urination
- Itching/irritation
- Unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- Unusual vaginal bleeding
- Pain during sex
- Sore, swollen lymph nodes, particularly in the groin but sometimes more widespread
- Lower abdominal pain
- Fever
- Rash over the trunk, hands or feet

STDs or STIs can be caused by:

- **Bacteria.** Gonorrhea, syphilis and chlamydia are examples of STIs that are caused by bacteria.
- **Parasites.** Trichomoniasis is an STI caused by a parasite.
- **Viruses.** STIs caused by viruses include HPV, genital herpes and HIV.

Other kinds of infections — hepatitis A, B and C viruses, shigella infection and giardia infection — can be spread through sexual activity, but it's possible to be infected without sexual contact.

Keep in mind...

STIs don't always cause symptoms, or they may not arise for months or years, so if you have any risk factors (engaging in sexual activity with others is a risk factor), it's important to **get tested regularly**. It's possible to contract sexually transmitted infections from people who seem perfectly healthy and may not even know they have an infection.

Complications may include:

- Pelvic pain
- Pregnancy complications
- Eye inflammation
- Arthritis
- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Infertility
- Heart disease
- Cancer (see HPV)

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STI RISK FACTORS & PREVENTION



Risk Factors:

Anyone who is sexually active risks exposure to an STI. Factors that may increase that risk include:

- Unprotected sex
- Multiple partners
- History of previous STIs
- Sexual assault (dealing with rape or assault is difficult, but it's important to seek care as soon as possible to receive screening, treatment and emotional support.
- Use of alcohol or recreational drugs
- Injecting drugs (needle sharing spreads many serious infections, including HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C)
- Age: Half of new STIs occur in people aged 15-24.

Prevention

There are several ways to avoid or reduce your risk of STDs or STIs.

- **Abstain.** The most effective way to avoid STIs is to not have (abstain from) sex.
- **Stay with one uninfected partner.** Another reliable way of avoiding STIs is to stay in a long-term relationship in which both people have sex only with each other and neither partner is infected.
- **Wait and test.** Avoid vaginal and anal intercourse with new partners until you have both been tested for STIs.
- **Get vaccinated.** Getting vaccinated early, before sexual exposure. Vaccines are available to prevent human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis A and hepatitis B.
- **Use condoms and dental dams** consistently and correctly.
 - Use a new latex condom or dental dam for each sex act, whether oral, vaginal or anal. Never use an oil-based lubricant, such as petroleum jelly, with a latex condom or dental dam.
 - Condoms made from natural membranes are not recommended because they're not effective at preventing STIs.
 - Latex condoms reduce your risk of exposure to most STIs, but they provide less protection for STIs involving exposed genital sores, such as HPV or herpes.
 - Also, nonbarrier forms of contraception, such as birth control pills or intrauterine devices (IUDs), don't protect against STIs.
- **Don't drink alcohol excessively or use drugs.** If you're under the influence, you're more likely to take sexual risks.
- **Communicate.** Before any serious sexual contact, communicate with your partner about practicing safer sex. Be sure you specifically agree on what activities will and won't be OK.
- **Consider male circumcision.** For men, there's evidence that circumcision can help reduce the risk of acquiring HIV from a woman with HIV by as much as 60%. Male circumcision may also help prevent transmission of genital HPV and genital herpes.
- **Consider using preexposure prophylaxis (PrEP).** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the use of two combination drugs to reduce the risk of HIV infection in people who are at very high risk.

Check out the latest updates and more details from **the Mayo Clinic** :



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