Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections that are spread by sexual contact. Sexually transmitted infections can cause severe damage to your body—even death.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infections that are passed from one person to another through sexual contact. The causes of STDs are bacteria, parasites, yeast, and viruses. There are more than 20 types of STDs, including

* [Chlamydia](https://medlineplus.gov/chlamydiainfections.html)
* [Genital herpes](https://medlineplus.gov/genitalherpes.html)
* [Gonorrhea](https://medlineplus.gov/gonorrhea.html)
* [HIV/AIDS](https://medlineplus.gov/hivaids.html)
* [HPV](https://medlineplus.gov/hpv.html)
* [Syphilis](https://medlineplus.gov/syphilis.html)
* [Trichomoniasis](https://medlineplus.gov/trichomoniasis.html)

Most STDs affect both men and women, but in many cases the health problems they cause can be more severe for women. If a pregnant woman has an STD, it can cause serious health problems for the baby.

Antibiotics can treat STDs caused by bacteria, yeast, or parasites. There is no cure for STDs caused by a virus, but medicines can often help with the symptoms and keep the disease under control.

Correct usage of latex condoms greatly reduces, but does not completely eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading STDs.

**How are STIs transmitted?**

A person with an STI can pass it to others by contact with skin, genitals, mouth, rectum, or body fluids. Anyone who has sexual contact—vaginal, anal, or oral sex—with another person may get an STI.

**What causes STIs?**

STIs are caused by bacterial or viral infections. Sexually transmitted infections caused by bacteria are treated with antibiotics. Those caused by viruses cannot be cured, but symptoms can be treated.

**What are the risk factors for STIs?**

The following factors increase the risk of getting STIs:

• More than one sexual partner

• A partner who has or has had more than one sexual partner

• Sex with someone who has an STI

• History of STIs

• Use of intravenous drugs (injected into a vein) or partner use of intravenous drugs

**How can I reduce the risk of getting an STI?**

Know your sexual partners and limit their number

Use a latex condom

Avoid risky sex practices

Get immunized—Vaccinations are available that will help prevent hepatitis B and some types of HPV

**What is chlamydia?**

Chlamydia is a common [sexually transmitted disease](https://medlineplus.gov/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html). It is caused by bacteria called Chlamydia trachomatis.

**How do you get chlamydia?**

You can get chlamydia during oral, vaginal, or anal sex with someone who has the infection. A woman can also pass chlamydia to her baby during childbirth.

Symptoms in women include

* Abnormal vaginal discharge, which may have a strong smell
* A burning sensation when urinating
* Pain during intercourse
* Discharge from your penis
* A burning sensation when urinating
* Burning or itching around the opening of your penis
* Pain and swelling in one or both testicles (although this is less common)

Lab tests to diagnose chlamydia.

a urine sample.

People at higher risk should get checked for chlamydia every year:

* Sexually active women 25 and younger
* Older women who have new or multiple sex partners, or a sex partner who has a sexually transmitted disease
* Men who have sex with men (MSM)

**What are the complications of chlamydia?**

[pelvic inflammatory disease](https://medlineplus.gov/pelvicinflammatorydisease.html) (PID). Long-term [pelvic pain](https://medlineplus.gov/pelvicpain.html), [infertility](https://medlineplus.gov/femaleinfertility.html), and [ectopic pregnancy](https://medlineplus.gov/ectopicpregnancy.html).

[reactive arthritis](https://medlineplus.gov/infectiousarthritis.html)

### What are the treatments for chlamydia?

Antibiotics

### Can I prevent chlamydia?

The only sure way to prevent chlamydia is to not have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

Correct usage of latex condoms greatly reduces

Genital herpes is a [sexually transmitted disease](https://medlineplus.gov/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html) (STD) caused by a [herpes simplex](https://medlineplus.gov/herpessimplex.html) virus (HSV).

General symptoms may include:

* Decreased appetite
* Fever
* General sick feeling ([malaise](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003089.htm))
* Muscle aches in the lower back, buttocks, thighs, or knees
* Swollen and tender lymph nodes in the groin

Genital symptoms include small, painful [blisters](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003939.htm) filled with clear or straw-colored fluid. Areas where the sores may found include:

* Outer vaginal lips (labia), vagina, cervix, around the anus, and on the thighs or buttocks (in women)
* Penis, scrotum, around the anus, on the thighs or buttocks (in men)
* Tongue, mouth, eyes, gums, lips, fingers, and other parts of the body (in both genders)

Other symptoms may include:

* [Pain when passing urine](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003145.htm)
* [Vaginal discharge](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003158.htm) (in women) or
* Problems emptying the bladder that may require a urinary catheter

**Exams and Tests**

[Culture of fluid from a blister or open sore](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003739.htm).

Blood tests that check for antibody level to the herpes virus

**Treatment**

Genital herpes cannot be cured. Medicines that fight viruses (such as acyclovir or valacyclovir) may be prescribed.

**HIV**

Some people may experience a flu-like illness within 2-4 weeks after HIV infection. But some people may not feel sick during this stage.

Flu-like symptoms can include:

* Fever
* Chills
* Rash
* Night sweats
* Muscle aches
* Sore throat
* Fatigue
* Swollen lymph nodes
* Mouth ulcers

Progress to Aids

Symptoms can include:

* Rapid weight loss
* Recurring fever or profuse night sweats
* Extreme and unexplained tiredness
* Prolonged swelling of the lymph glands in the armpits, groin, or neck
* Diarrhea that lasts for more than a week
* Sores of the mouth, anus, or genitals
* Pneumonia
* Red, brown, pink, or purplish blotches on or under the skin or inside the mouth, nose, or eyelids
* Memory loss, depression, and other neurologic disorders.

**More about it**

Sexually transmitted infections may be caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites. Anyone who is sexually active can catch an STI. Medical treatment may cure or relieve symptoms. Use condoms to reduce your risk.

Sexually transmissible infections include chlamydia, herpes, gonorrhoea, syphilis, genital herpes, scabies, pubic lice (crabs), hepatitis and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

**Symptoms of STIs**

There are many different STIs and there are many signs that mean you may have caught one, but sometimes, there are no signs at all. When STIs do produce symptoms, they usually develop on the genital area. Your sexual contacts may also experience symptoms.  
  
Generally, the symptoms of STIs can include:

* unusual discharge from the penis, vagina or anus
* pain during sex or urination
* sores, blisters, ulcers, warts or rashes in the genital area
* itchiness or irritation in the genital area
* persistent diarrhoea
* fever or flu-like symptoms
* abnormal or unusual vaginal bleeding, especially after having sex
* pain in the scrotum or testicles
* lumps and bumps on the genitals.

The most common sexual activities that can spread an STI from one partner to another include:

* vaginal sex – the man’s penis in the woman’s vagina
* anal sex – the man’s penis in the partner’s anus (the partner can be either male or female)
* oral sex – the man’s penis in the partner’s mouth, or the partner’s mouth or tongue in the woman’s vagina
* oral-anal sex – one partner’s mouth or tongue on the other partner’s anus.

[Back to top](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/sexually-transmissible-infections-stis#lp-contents)

**Diagnosis of STIs**

The only way to find out if you have a sexually transmissible infection is to have a sexual health check-up. Doctors deal with sexual health problems on a daily basis, so don’t be embarrassed to ask for help.  
  
Sexual health check-ups are easy to do. In most cases, it involves only a simple urine test. Some infections can be diagnosed on the day and treated at the time of your visit. Other results may take up to a week.

**Testing for STIs**

For people with no symptoms, testing for STIs depends on how sexually active you are and whether you use condoms consistently. It is recommended that you get tested:

* after any unprotected sexual contact with a new or casual sexual partner
* after any unprotected sex, if you know or suspect that your partner has had other sexual partners
* after any unwanted or non-consensual sexual contact
* after any unprotected sexual contact in countries where HIV and other STIs are common.
* if your partner tells you that they have been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection.

**How to reduce your risk of STIs**

It is not difficult to avoid catching STIs. You can prevent most STIs by using barrier protection such as condoms, female condoms and dams (a thin piece of latex placed over the anal or vulval area during oral sex).

**Treatments for STIs**

Many STIs are easily treated once they are diagnosed. Treatments for the different types of infections can include:

* bacteria – (including chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis) require treatment with antibiotics (either one high dose or a course)
* parasites – (including pubic lice and scabies) require treatment with medicated shampoos
* viruses – (including genital herpes, HIV, hepatitis B and human papillomavirus (HPV)) do not have a cure. In most cases, there are treatments to help control the symptoms.