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Understanding & Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

What are STIs?

STIs, or sexually transmitted infections, are infections usually passed on during unprotected sex with an infected partner. This can be vaginal, oral or anal sex, and sometimes skin-to-skin contact.

Many STIs are 'silent' with no signs or symptoms. But if you don't treat them, they can cause health problems, from skin sores, to serious illness with damage to the body, or even death.

For example, gonorrhoea and chlamydia can cause infertility (so you can't have a baby), especially in girls and women. You can die from HIV/AIDS.

STIs are everywhere, including Australia.

You can't tell if someone else has an STI just by looking at them.

Not getting STIs in the first place by avoiding the risks is much easier than treating them. But if you are at risk, get checked soon. Most STIs are easier to treat the sooner they are found.

Am I at risk?

- I have had unsafe sex (without a condom, condom not used properly, condom fell off).
- I have a new partner or many partners.
- I have discharge, pain or sores in my genital area.
- I was named as a contact of someone else with an STI.
- I can't remember if I had unsafe sex (eg if I was drunk).
- My partner and/or I inject or have ever injected drugs.
- I have had contact with someone else's blood (eg getting a tattoo or body piercing, fighting).

If you said YES even once, or are thinking of having a baby, GET AN STI CHECK.

If you had unsafe sex with a high risk partner, get checked as soon as possible.



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How do I know if I have an STI?

Most people have no symptoms (signs) at all.

But some symptoms are:

- Unusual discharge (pus) from the penis or vagina
- Pain or irritation when passing urine, or during sex
- Sores, blisters, ulcers, warts, lumps or rashes in the genital or anal area
- Itchiness or irritation in the genital or anal area
- Pain in the lower belly
- Changes in periods.

Some STIs, such as hepatitis B, syphilis and HIV, can initially seem like the flu. But even if the symptoms go away, the infection could still be in your body and cause health problems later on.

You can find out more about the signs of each STI later in this factsheet.

If you could be at risk, visit your doctor for an STI check-up. Other places where you can get STI check-ups are listed at the end of the factsheet.

How to prevent STIs

- Don't have sex. It is your right to say NO if you don't want sex.
- Have sex with only one partner. This is only safe if neither one of you ever has sex with other people, and if both of you have been tested for STIs and aren't infected.
- Only have sex in ways that don't spread STIs. Kissing, sensuous touching and mutual masturbation are generally safe (although close skin-to-skin contact can spread some STIs).
- Use barriers to help prevent STIs. Use condoms, female condoms (which fit into the vagina) and dental dams (a sheet of rubber that prevents skin-to-skin contact during oral sex).

How to use Condoms

Condoms help protect you and your partner against STIs such as gonorrhoea, chlamydia and HIV/AIDS. They also protect against unplanned pregnancies.

Condoms may not prevent STIs that spread through close skin-to-skin contact, but are still the best way of preventing most STIs.

Use well-known brands and check the expiry date. Store condoms in a cool, dry place, as heat damages condoms.

If you go overseas, take condoms with you as quality condoms aren't sold in some countries.

Condoms only help protect you against STIs if you use them correctly every time you have sex.



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- Before sex, open the packet carefully - don't use your teeth.
- Roll on when the penis is hard.
- Pinch the tip so air doesn't get trapped as you roll it down.
- Put on some water-based lubricant such as KY Jelly, Muko, Lubafax or Wet Stuff. Use lots of lubricant, especially for anal sex, or the condom can tear. Don't use Vaseline, baby oil or saliva as they damage the condom.
- Hold the condom on your penis when you pull out so semen (cum) doesn't spill out.
- Don't re-use condoms.
- Throw the condom in the bin, not down the toilet.
- Don't re-use condoms.
- Don't use 2 condoms at once.
- If the condom breaks, visit your doctor or a sexual health clinic as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours.
- Learn to use condoms properly - practice alone before the 'real thing'.

Always use a condom during vaginal, oral and anal sex.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Most STIs are simple to test for and easy to treat.

Your doctor or nurse will probably take samples of your blood and urine, and/or a swab (with a cotton bud) from your genital area.

People often have more than one STI, so get tested for all STIs.

Treatment can involve antibiotics, creams or lotions. Follow the instructions, and if you don't understand or forget, ask the doctor or a pharmacist. You need to take all the medicine you have been given.

You'll probably need to go back for an 'all clear' check.

Pap Smears

All sexually active females should have a Pap smear every 2 years.

A Pap smear is a test done during an internal vaginal examination. It involves collecting cells from the cervix to detect changes, which might lead to cancer if left untreated.

It's also a good chance to ask for an STI test at the same time.

Common STIs

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is the most common STI in Australia, particularly among men and women aged between 15 and 25.

Cause: Bacteria called Chlamydia trachomatis.



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Spread by: Unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex.

An infected mother can spread chlamydia to her baby during birth, causing serious lung and eye infections.

You can have chlamydia more than once.

Symptoms:

Most men and women have no symptoms.

When there are symptoms, they can take from days to weeks to develop and can include:

Females:

- an unusual vaginal discharge
- a burning feeling when passing urine
- pain during vaginal sex
- pain in the lower belly
- unusual bleeding or spotting between periods.

Males:

- a clear, whitish or grey discharge from the penis
- burning or pain when passing urine
- irritation or soreness around the tip of the penis
- pain in the testicles or rectum
- pain with ejaculation

Untreated chlamydia can cause infertility in both men and women.

An infected pregnant girl or woman is more likely to have a stillborn (dead) or premature baby.

Tests:

Females: urine test and swabs from the cervix or vagina.

Males: urine test and/or a swab from the urethra.

Treatment: Usually antibiotics. Avoid vaginal, oral and anal sex until treatment is completed, and all sexual partners are tested and treated.

Prevention: Always use a condom. Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms.



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Genital Herpes

Cause: Herpes simplex virus type 1 (generally causes cold sores on the mouth) or type 2 (generally affects the genital area). However, both types can affect the genital area and the mouth.

Spread by: Vaginal, oral and anal sex or skin-to-skin contact with someone who already has the virus. Cold sores on the mouth can spread the virus to the genitals during oral sex.

Herpes is most easily spread when there are visible blisters or sores, but it can also be spread when there are no sores or other symptoms.

An infected mother can pass herpes on to her baby during birth. If you're pregnant and have herpes, tell your doctor.

Symptoms: The infected part of the genitals might feel sore or tingling. You may feel generally unwell as if you are getting the flu, then small blisters appear. They burst and become ulcers or sores. Later, scabs form, and finally the skin heals after 1 to 2 weeks.

Once you are infected with herpes, the symptoms can come back many times. The first herpes episode is usually the worst although some people have no symptoms. Any further episodes are often milder.

Females: Blisters can be anywhere on the genital area, usually around the vagina, urethra, cervix, or anal area.

Males: Blisters usually occur on the penis and under the foreskin, and sometimes inside the urethra, on the scrotum, or around the anal area.

Tests: Swabs from the infected area.

It's best if the blister or sore is less than 4 days old.

Treatment: Genital herpes can be controlled but cannot be cured.

You may be given antiviral drugs for a severe episode. These ease the pain, and reduce the number and severity of episodes. They also lower the risk of passing on the infection when you don't have symptoms.

During an episode, paracetamol or aspirin will help to reduce the pain and soreness. Bathing sores with salt water also helps them heal.

Prevention: Avoid vaginal, oral and anal sex while there are herpes sores or blisters present. You are most infectious from the first signs that sores are developing until the sores are completely healed. You may also be infectious even when you don't have any sores.

Always use a condom. Condoms reduce the risk of infection, but only from/to the area of skin protected by the condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners. Have sex in ways that don't spread STIs (eg mutual masturbation).

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms



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Genital Warts

Cause: Human papilloma virus (HPV or genital wart virus).

Spread by: Vaginal, oral or anal sex, or by direct skin-to-skin contact.

Symptoms: Genital warts are small lumps anywhere on the genitals or anus, which can be seen or felt, and are usually painless. They can sometimes be in the mouth or throat. They are different from the warts found on hands and knees.

Tests: Usually just by looking.

Treatment: Genital warts are treated in several ways:

- podophyllotoxin paint (not suitable for pregnant women)
- cryotherapy (warts are frozen off with liquid nitrogen)
- imiquimod cream (not suitable for pregnant women)
- laser treatment
- surgical removal

Don't use lotions made for other types of warts.

All sexual partners should be checked, and treated if they have genital warts.

Don't have sex when you have warts you can see or feel.

Use condoms with your regular partner for up to 6 months after treatment as this is the time that warts are most likely to return.

Prevention: Always use a condom. Condoms reduce the risk of infection, but only from/to the area of skin protected by the condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have sex in ways that don't spread STIs (such as mutual masturbation).

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Gonorrhoea ('the Clap')

Cause: Bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

Spread by: Unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex.

An infected mother can pass gonorrhoea on to her baby during birth, which can cause blindness.

You can have gonorrhoea more than once.

Symptoms: Often there are no symptoms. If there are symptoms, they can include:

Females: An unusual vaginal discharge, and pain when passing urine. However, women often don't have any symptoms unless the infection has spread to the uterus and fallopian tubes. This can cause lower belly pain, or pain during vaginal sex.

Males: A yellow discharge from the penis, and a burning sensation when passing urine.



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A sore throat or discharge from the rectum could also be symptoms of gonorrhoea after oral or anal sex in both males and females.

Untreated gonorrhoea can cause infertility in both men and women.

Tests:

Females: urine test and swabs from the cervix or vagina.

Males: urine test and/or a swab from the urethra.

Treatment: Antibiotics. After the treatment is finished, the test is repeated to make sure the gonorrhoea is cured. Avoid sex until the treatment is finished and tests show the infection has gone.

Prevention: Always use a condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Hepatitis B

Cause: Hepatitis B virus.

Spread by: Blood-to-blood contact, and by unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex. The main risks from blood-to-blood contact are sharing needles and other injecting equipment, a needlestick injury in a health care setting, sharing personal hygiene items (such as razors, and toothbrushes), and non-sterile tattooing and body piercing equipment.

An infected mother can pass on hepatitis B to her baby during birth.

Symptoms: Most adults who are infected don't suffer a serious illness. Some people have from mild flu-like symptoms to a severe illness. The skin and whites of the eyes turn yellow (jaundice), and there can be fever, loss of appetite, tiredness and pain in the joints.

Most adults recover completely from hepatitis B. However, some people go on to be long-term carriers, even if they don't feel sick.

Carriers can infect other people, and are at risk of liver cirrhosis (damage) and liver cancer years after getting hepatitis B.

Tests: Blood test. As this test doesn't usually pick up new infections, if your result is negative, you will need to have the test again in 3 months' time.

Treatment: If you are exposed to hepatitis B, there is special treatment that can prevent infection if you see a doctor immediately.

Long-term carriers can be treated with interferon and/or antiviral medicine.

Prevention: Hepatitis B vaccination. Always use a condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Never share needles, syringes or any other injecting equipment. Make sure injecting equipment is new and/or sterile.



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Never use contaminated tattooing and body piercing equipment. Don't share other people's jewellery in new piercing sites.

Never share personal items such as razors, toothbrushes or dental floss.

For more information contact the Hepatitis Council of WA (see end of factsheet).

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

HIV/AIDS

Cause: HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), which can lead to AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome).

Spread by: Unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex, and blood-to-blood contact. The main risks from blood-to-blood contact are through sharing needles and other injecting equipment, and the use of non-sterile tattooing and body piercing equipment. An infected mother can pass HIV on to her unborn baby in the womb, during birth or from breast feeding.

Symptoms: Some people have severe flu-like symptoms within 6 weeks of being infected, but others have no symptoms. People with HIV can feel and look healthy for 10 years or more. As the virus continues to attack the immune system, people develop various signs of the infection. These include: constant tiredness, swollen glands, rapid weight loss, night sweats, memory loss and diarrhoea. When the immune system is badly damaged, certain cancers and infections can occur. This stage of the infection is called AIDS.

Tests: Blood test. As this test doesn't usually pick up new infections, if your result is negative, you will need to have the test again in 3 months' time.

Treatment: If you are exposed to HIV, there is special treatment that can prevent infection if you see a doctor immediately. Someone with HIV remains infected for life. There is no vaccine or cure. If their HIV infection is found early enough, with daily treatment, people can live for many years. Pregnant women can receive treatment so their babies probably won't get HIV. You must tell your doctor if you are pregnant and have HIV.

Prevention: Always use a condom.
Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.
Never share needles and other injecting equipment. Make sure injecting equipment is new and/or sterile.
Never use contaminated tattooing and body piercing equipment. Don't share other people's jewellery in new piercing sites.
Never share personal items such as razors, toothbrushes or dental floss.
For more information contact the WA AIDS Council (see end of factsheet).

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms



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Non-specific Urethritis (NSU) and Cervicitis

Cause: Non-specific urethritis (NSU) is the name given to a group of common STIs that affect men. They are non-specific because there are many different causes. Urethritis is an infection of the urethra, the tube that empties urine from the bladder. Cervicitis is the female equivalent of NSU.

Spread by: Usually by unprotected vaginal sex, however also by unprotected oral or anal sex.

Symptoms: Often there are no symptoms. If there are symptoms, they may not show up for several days or weeks, and can include:

Females:

- an unusual vaginal discharge
- a burning feeling when passing urine
- pain during vaginal sex
- lower abdominal pain.

Males:

- a discharge from the penis
- pain when passing urine.

Untreated NSU and cervicitis can cause male and female infertility.

Tests: Swabs from the cervix and/or urethra.

Treatment: Antibiotics. Avoid sex until treatment is completed and the swabs are repeated. Make sure all sexual partners are tested and treated.

Untreated, these infections can lead to serious diseases.

In females, the infection can spread to the fallopian tubes and cause infertility (see Pelvic Inflammatory Disease).

In males, NSU can lead to prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate gland), epididymitis (inflammation of the testicles) and infertility.

Prevention: Always use a condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

Cause: When an infection such as gonorrhoea, chlamydia or NSU, spreads into a woman's reproductive organs.

Spread by: Unprotected vaginal sex.

Symptoms: Often there are no symptoms. If there are symptoms, they can include:

- an unusual vaginal discharge
- pain when passing urine and during vaginal sex



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- lower belly pain or discomfort
- unusual vaginal bleeding or spotting
- heavy and more painful periods
- fever with or without chills.

One or more attacks of PID can damage and scar the fallopian tubes. This can reduce fertility or lead to ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy in the fallopian tubes which can be very dangerous).

Tests: Swabs from the vagina, cervix and/or urethra, urine test, ultrasound, and laparoscopy (using a special camera).

Treatment: Antibiotics. Avoid sexual intercourse until treatment is completed and all sexual partners are tested and treated.

Prevention: Always use a condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Syphilis

Cause: Bacteria called *Treponema pallidum*.

Spread by: Unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex, or direct contact with open sores. If left untreated during pregnancy, the baby can die or be born deformed and unwell.

Symptoms: The first stage shows as an ulcer or sore, usually around the genital area or on/in the mouth. This sore usually appears 3 to 12 weeks after infection. It's generally painless, doesn't bleed, and can feel like a hard button under the skin. If not treated, the sores heal and disappear after a few weeks.

The secondary stage occurs a few months later and lasts 6 months or more. Symptoms can include a flat, red rash on the face, palms, and soles of the feet, a sore throat, swollen glands, lumps around moist areas of the body, and patchy hair loss. Headaches, pains in the bones, muscles and joints can also occur.

Without treatment, there is a 'latent' stage when there are no visible signs, but the person is still infectious.

In about 1 in 10 people, damage caused by untreated syphilis shows many years after the initial infection. This can seriously damage the body, including the heart and brain.

Tests: Usually a blood test, and swabs if there are sores.

Treatment: Antibiotics. Avoid vaginal, oral and anal sex until treatment is completed and all sexual partners are tested and treated. Syphilis can be cured, especially if found early.



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Prevention: Always use a condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Less Common Infections

Donovanosis

Cause: Bacteria called *Klebsiella granulomatis*.

Spread by: Unprotected vaginal or anal sex.

Symptoms: Painless red ulcers/sores appear on the genitals weeks to months after infection. Ulcers start small and continue to enlarge over a period of time. The infection can spread to other parts of the body.

Tests: A swab taken from the ulcer/sore.

Treatment: Antibiotics. Avoid sexual intercourse until treatment is completed and all sexual partners are examined, tested and treated.

Prevention: Always use a condom. Condoms reduce the risk of infection, but only from/to the area of skin protected by the condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have sex in ways that don't spread STIs (eg mutual masturbation).

Avoid sex with partners who have genital sores.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Trichomoniasis

Cause: Parasite called *Trichomonas vaginalis*.

Spread by: Unprotected vaginal sex.

Symptoms:

Females: The most common symptom is a light yellow-green vaginal discharge, which may cause irritation. Symptoms can appear 4 to 20 days after infection. Some females don't have any symptoms.

Men: Most men don't have any symptoms. A man may notice a slight discharge from the urethra, and burning or pain when passing urine or during sex.

Tests: Swabs.



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Treatment: Antibiotics.

Avoid vaginal sex until treatment is completed and all sexual partners are tested and treated.

Tell your doctor if you could be pregnant as the usual treatment could be harmful.

Prevention: Always use a condom.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Other Related Infections

These include genital infections that may require treatment. They are not true STIs, but you can get them from sexual contact.

Bacterial Vaginosis

Cause: An overgrowth of bacteria normally found in the vagina.

Spread by: Not known, but often linked to sexual activity and new sex partners.

Symptoms: Fishy or musty smell coming from the vagina. The smell may get stronger after sexual intercourse. There can be a vaginal discharge, which can vary from a little to a lot. The discharge is usually like a grey/white paste, but this can vary too.

Tests: Swabs from the vagina.

Treatment: Usually with antibiotics. If there are no symptoms, you don't need treatment as it's probably a harmless overgrowth of bacteria.

Tell your doctor if you could be pregnant as the usual treatment could be harmful.

If a woman has bacterial vaginosis, her sex partner doesn't usually need treatment.

Prevention: After going to the toilet, always wipe yourself from front to back, to prevent bacteria from getting into the vagina.

Always use a condom. Most, but not all cases seem linked with sexual activity.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Cystitis

Cause: Infection of the urinary tract by bacteria that normally live in the bowel.

Spread by: Sex, or wiping from back to front after a bowel movement.



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Symptoms: Symptoms can include:

- burning when passing urine
- needing to pass urine a lot
- a constant dull ache in the lower belly
- urine which smells or contains blood or pus.

If cystitis is left untreated, the infection can spread into the kidneys causing backache, fever or bouts of shivering.

Treatment: Antibiotics.

The following self-help treatments can help, but see a doctor if the symptoms continue:

- Drink lots of water (not coffee, tea or alcohol) - at least 2 litres a day.
- Take aspirin or paracetamol if you are in pain.
- Put a hot water bottle or wheat bag on your back and/or between your legs. Have a warm bath or rest in a warm bed.

Prevention:

- Avoid alcohol. It dehydrates the body, making the urine strong and acidic. This could trigger an attack.
- Always wipe from front to back after going to the toilet.
- Don't hold on to urine for too long.
- Use a water-based personal lubricant when having sex. Pass urine soon after having sex.
- Wash your genital area and anus regularly with water only. Avoid heavily perfumed soaps and sprays in the genital area as they can cause irritation.
- Wear cotton underwear, and avoid tight jeans and nylon tights.

Have an STI check-up if you've had:

- unsafe sex
- a new partner
- symptoms

Hepatitis A

Cause: Hepatitis A virus.

Spread by: Water and food contaminated by infected faeces, close personal contact, or oral-anal sex.

Symptoms: Symptoms usually appear about 4 weeks after infection, and include tiredness, body aches and pains, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, fever and chills, upper belly pain and yellowing of skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice).

Tests: Blood test.

Treatment: There is no specific treatment, unless you get treated within 2 weeks of infection. Plenty of rest and a good diet are important.

Prevention: Always use a protective barrier (a dental dam) to prevent oral-anal contact. Hepatitis A can be prevented by vaccination.



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Hepatitis C

Cause: Hepatitis C virus.

Spread by: Blood-to-blood contact by sharing needles and other injecting equipment, a needlestick injury in a health care setting, sharing personal hygiene items (such as razors, toothbrushes and dental floss) and use of non-sterile tattooing and body piercing equipment.

There is a low risk of an infected mother passing on hepatitis C to her baby during pregnancy and birth. There is a risk of hepatitis C from unprotected sex involving blood or damage to the skin.

Symptoms: Some people infected with hepatitis C have no symptoms at first, while others get a mild flu-like illness. Sometimes the urine becomes dark, and the whites of the eyes and skin turn yellow (jaundice).

All symptoms may disappear after a few weeks, but this doesn't mean the infection has gone. Symptoms of long-term (chronic) hepatitis include fever, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, tiredness and pain in the joints. Some people develop liver cirrhosis (damage) or liver cancer later in life.

Tests: Blood test. As this test doesn't usually pick up new infections, if your result is negative, you will need to have the test again in 4 to 6 months' time.

Treatment: Treatment cures up to 8 out of every 10 people depending on the type of hepatitis C. A healthy diet, enough sleep, and avoiding alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are also important.

Prevention: Never share needles, syringes or any other injecting equipment. Make sure injecting equipment is new and/or sterile.

Never use contaminated tattooing and body piercing equipment. Don't share other people's jewellery in new piercing sites.

Never share personal items such as razors, toothbrushes or dental floss.

Always use a condom. Avoid sex with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C.

For more information contact the Hepatitis Council of WA (see end of factsheet).

Molluscum Contagiosum

Cause: Pox virus.

Spread by: Close skin-to-skin contact. Molluscum contagiosum can be spread through both sexual and non-sexual contact.

Symptoms: Pearly lumps, usually on the pubic area, thighs and lower belly. The spots can appear in groups and be itchy. Scratching can spread the virus.

Tests: Usually just by looking.

Treatment: The lumps can disappear by themselves, but they can be removed, or frozen by applying liquid nitrogen.



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Prevention: Always use a condom. Avoid sexual activity with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Pubic Lice (Crabs)

Cause: *Phthirus pubis* (the crab louse).

Spread by: Direct skin-to-skin contact including sexual activity, and contact with towels, underclothing or bedding of an infected person. Condoms don't protect you against pubic lice.

Symptoms: Itching in the pubic hair and/or visible eggs or lice.

Tests: Usually just by looking.

Treatment: Insecticide lotions or shampoos (check with your doctor or pharmacist). At the time of treatment, wash all bed linen, towels and clothing in hot water. Sex partners should be treated at the same time. You don't need to shave your pubic hair.

Prevention: Pubic lice can be caught through both sexual and non-sexual contact. Avoid sexual activity with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Scabies

Cause: *Sarcoptes scabiei* (a mite which lays its eggs under the skin surface).

Spread by: Close skin-to-skin contact, including sexual activity, and contact with towels, underclothing or bedding of an infected person. Condoms don't protect you against scabies.

Symptoms: Itching. A rash on the genitals, knees, buttocks, waistline, hands, wrists, and between the fingers. You may see silvery lines where the mite has burrowed.

Tests: Usually just by looking.

Treatment: Anti-scabies lotions (check with your doctor or pharmacist). At the time of treatment, wash all bed linen, towels and clothing in hot water, and dry them well. Avoid skin-to-skin contact with your partner or other close contacts until:

- treatment is completed, and
- sexual partners and all household members have completed treatment.

The itch often lasts for 4 weeks after successful treatment.

Prevention: Scabies can be caught through both sexual contact and non-sexual contact. Avoid sexual activity with casual partners and/or decrease the number of partners.

Thrush

Cause: An overgrowth of a fungus (*Candida albicans*), which lives naturally in the bowel and the vagina.

Spread by: Not an STI, but often linked to sexual activity.



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Symptoms: Symptoms of thrush vary, but can include:

Females:

- white and cheesy-looking discharge, frequently thick with a yeasty smell
- stinging pain when passing urine
- pain or discomfort during sex
- itchy and swollen genitals

Males:

- red spots or a rash on the penis, scrotum or groin

Tests: Usually examination and/or swabs.

Treatment: Usually vaginal cream or pessaries (dissolving tablets you put into the vagina). Complete the treatment even if a period occurs while still using the tablets or cream. Avoid tampons during treatment.

Natural yoghurt may soothe the area but doesn't treat the infection.

If you often get thrush, see a doctor as you may have other health problems or a drug-resistant type of Candida. Your sexual partners may need treatment to prevent reinfection.

Prevention:

- Wear cotton underwear and avoid tight trousers and nylon tights.
- Always wash your hands after you have been to the toilet and before touching the vaginal area.
- Always wipe yourself from front to back after going to the toilet.
- Don't have vaginal sex straight after anal sex. Wash thoroughly after anal sex and use a new condom before vaginal sex.
- Wash the genital area with water only. Soaps can affect the natural acidity of the body. After washing, gently wipe the area dry.
- Avoid soaps or sprays in the genital area, as they can cause irritation.
- Thrush can be passed on by having sex. Always use condoms when having sex to avoid this.

What if I think I have an STI?

Remember, many STIs are 'silent'. If you have had unsafe sex with a person who has an STI or symptoms of an STI, or if you have any symptoms (see page 2):

- See a doctor immediately. If you have symptoms don't just wait and hope they'll go away. Even if they do, the infection could still be there.
- If you don't have a regular doctor, or want to see another doctor, contact any of the services listed on pages 20 and 21. These services are confidential and most are free.
- Don't have vaginal, oral or anal sex until you have seen a doctor and been told that you don't have an STI.
- If you know who you caught an STI from, or think you may have passed an STI on to someone else, discuss with your doctor the best way of telling that person that they need an STI check-up. Naming and following-up your sexual contacts so that they can also be tested and treated for STIs is called Contact Tracing.



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Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is a way to stop the spread of many different infections, including STIs.

Who is a contact?

A contact is anyone you had unsafe sex and/or blood-to-blood contact with.

- Sex includes unprotected vaginal, anal and/or oral sex.
- Blood-to-blood contact can occur through sharing needles and other injecting equipment, using non-sterile body piercing or tattooing equipment, or sharing personal items contaminated with blood (such as razors).

What is contact tracing?

Contact tracing involves finding and telling the contacts of a person with an infection that they may have the infection and that they can get counselling and testing, and treatment if necessary.

Why is contact tracing important?

Contact tracing is important:

- To stop the spread of infection in the community.
- To prevent long-term health problems.

People often don't know they have an STI and so unknowingly spread it to others.

Who does contact tracing?

You can do contact tracing yourself and/or with the help of a health professional. Discuss this with your doctor.

How is contact tracing done?

Contact tracing should be voluntary.

- You will be asked to list your contacts (names and other details).
- Decide which contacts you want to tell about the infection, and which ones you would prefer a health professional to talk to.

Whoever talks to your contact, they should be told that:

- they could have the infection
- they need to get tested
- contact tracing is strictly confidential, and your identity is protected.

Sexual Behaviours and STIs

This factsheet refers to different kinds of sexual behaviours. They are:

Vaginal Sex

The man's penis in the woman's vagina. Most common STIs, including HIV, can be spread through vaginal sex. Either partner can infect the other. Withdrawal (pulling out before ejaculation/orgasm) is also unsafe. Using condoms correctly greatly reduces the risk of spreading STIs.



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Anal Sex

The man's penis in a partner's anus (partner can be a man or a woman). Most common STIs, including HIV, can be spread through anal sex. Either partner can infect the other. Withdrawal (pulling out before ejaculation/orgasm) is also unsafe. Using condoms correctly greatly reduces the risk of spreading STIs.

Oral Sex

The man's penis in a partner's mouth OR the partner's mouth or tongue in the woman's vagina (the partner can be a man or a woman). Some STIs can be spread through oral sex. The risk is greater if semen, blood or vaginal fluids enter the mouth. Either partner can infect the other. Using condoms or dental dams reduces the risk.

Oral-Anal Sex

One partner's mouth, or tongue, on or in the other partner's anus. Some STIs, hepatitis A and bowel infections can be spread through oral-anal sex. Using dental dams reduces the risk.

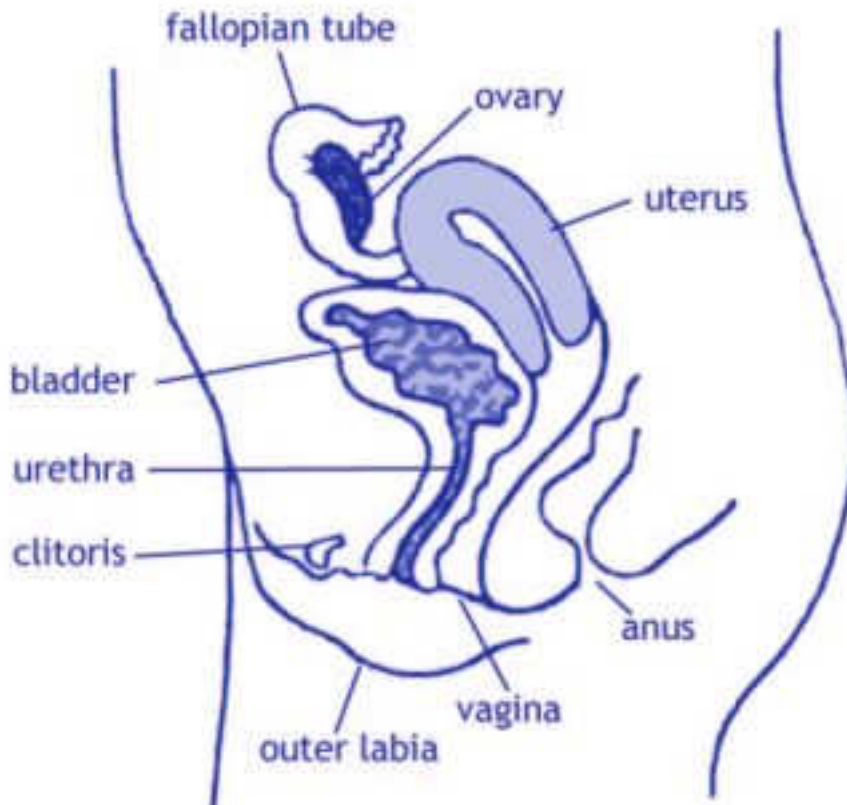
Masturbation

Fondling your own genitals for sexual pleasure.

Mutual Masturbation

Fondling a partner's genitals for sexual pleasure.

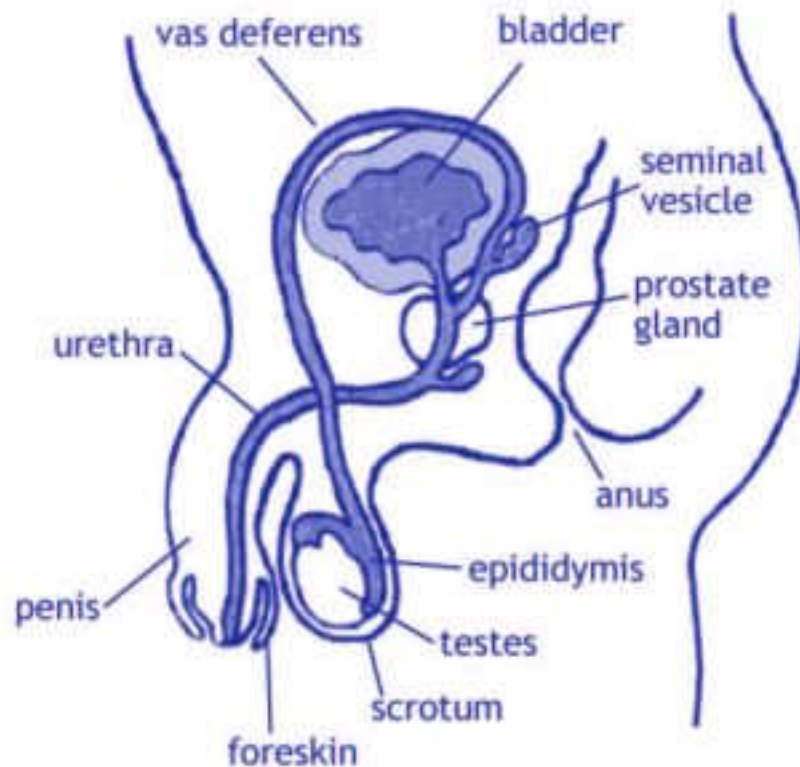
Female Reproductive Organs





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Male Reproductive Organs



Sex and the Law

In Western Australia, you can't have sex with anyone if they are under 16.

Sex between adults is lawful when:

- Both people are OK about it
- Both people have agreed to it
- Both people have a completely free choice.

Sex between adults is unlawful when:

- A person is forced to have sex
- A person has no choice
- A person is tricked, or drugged or threatened in any way.

Both people have to be happy to have sex with each other. You can also change your mind half way through. If one of you does change their mind, then the other person has to let them go.

The law is not just about penetrative sex. Any kind of sexual touching is unlawful if the other person doesn't want it to happen.



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STI Services & Information

Confidential STI tests and treatment are available from:
(Most of these services are free. Please telephone first to see if you need an appointment).

Your GP or a doctor of your choice

Sexual Health Helpline

(08) 9227 6178
1800 198 205 toll-free
Email: sexhelp@fpwa.org.au

Fremantle Hospital

Infectious Diseases Department,
Sexual Health Service (B2 Clinic)
Alma St, FREMANTLE
(08) 9431 2149

Royal Perth Hospital

Sexual Health Clinic
48 Murray St, PERTH
(08) 9224 2178

FPWA - Sexual Health Services

70 Roe Street, NORTHBRIDGE
(08) 9227 6177
Email: sexhelp@fpwa.org.au
Web: www.fpwa.org.au

Quarry Health Centre

(For under 25's)
Rear, 7 Quarry Street, FREMANTLE
(08) 9430 4544

Women's Health Services

100 Aberdeen Street, NORTHBRIDGE
(08) 9227 8122

Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service

156 Wittenoom Street, PERTH
(08) 9421 3888

And some regional Population Health Units (below) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services.



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For more detailed information on many of these STIs, contact:

WA AIDS Council Inc.

664 Murray Street, WEST PERTH

(08) 9482 0000

AIDSline (08) 9482 0044

Web: www.waaid.com

Hepatitis Council of WA Inc.

102 James Street, NORTHBRIDGE

(08) 9328 8538

Toll-free: 1800 800 070 (country callers)

Web: www.hepatitiswa.com.au

Communicable Disease Control Directorate

Department of Health

(08) 9388 4999

Email: cdc@health.wa.gov.au

HealthInfo 1300 135 030 or

www.population.health.wa.gov.au

Regional Population Health Units

(Those in bold provide clinical services)

Albany (08) 9842 7500

Broome (08) 9194 1630

Bunbury (08) 9781 2350

Carnarvon (08) 9941 0560

Geraldton (08) 9956 1985

Kalgoorlie-Boulder (08) 9080 8200

Northam (08) 9622 4320

South Hedland (08) 9172 8333

While every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this publication, it cannot replace medical advice. Please visit a health professional if you have any concerns with your health.

Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Program

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