What are STIs?

STIs are caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites.

Most STIs are spread through unprotected vaginal, anal and oral sex, and also via sex toys.

Intimate genital contact with someone already infected can also spread STIs such as herpes and genital warts.

Use condoms and dental dams to enjoy safer sex and prevent STIs.

STIs and HIV

Some STIs can cause sores that increase the risk of HIV transmission...

...to you if you are HIV-negative

...from you if you are HIV-positive. Being positive also makes you more at risk of STIs.

If you notice any sores:

- Do not have unprotected sex, and avoid other unprotected sexual activities until you have had a sexual health check-up.
- Avoid sex - some STIs are passed on via skin-to-skin contact.

STI symptoms

Many people who have an infection experience NO symptoms.

Others may experience:

- sores/soreness
- unusual lumps
- itching
- pain when urinating or defecating
- unusual discharge from the genitals.

Symptoms may not appear for several weeks after infection.

When to get a sexual health check

Access medical healthcare as soon as you notice symptoms.

If left untreated, some STIs can have serious consequences such as infertility.

As many people will have no STI symptoms, it is advised that everyone has:

- regular sexual health check ups
- a check-up before and after unprotected sex or sexual activities with a new partner.

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We rely on donations to provide HIV and AIDS information worldwide www.avert.org/donate

Last review: 18/08/2014
Next review: 18/02/2016
References: www.avert.org/learn-share/hiv-fact-sheets/sexually-transmitted-infections

Charity no: 1074849
Testing for STIs

Having a sexual health check-up can involve various tests, such as:

- genital examination
- genital or oral swab for bacteria
- urine sample
- blood test.

Some test results can be generated straight away, and will be given to you at the clinic.

Other results will take up to two weeks and you will be telephoned by the clinic.

Get STIs treated

Taking treatment can cure most STIs. A few are incurable, but can be managed with treatment.

If you have an STI, get treatment early to avoid health risks to yourself and others.

Antibiotics or creams cure many STIs.

Longer lasting infections are managed by other treatments, such as antiviral drugs for Hepatitis C.

Inform any recent sexual partners of any STI diagnosis so they can access STI testing.

Most common STIs

Chlamydia

Symptoms: unusual discharge, painful urination, abdominal pain, pain in rectum.
Diagnosed by: swab or urine sample.
Treatment: antibiotics.

Genital warts

Symptoms: white or flesh coloured bumps around genital area that may be itchy.
Diagnosed by: visible to the eye.
Treatment: medical removal of the warts.

Gonorrhea

Symptoms: unusual discharge, painful & more frequent urination, painful defecation.
Diagnosed by: swab or urine sample.
Treatment: antibiotics.

Hepatitis

Symptoms: flu-like illness, nausea, loss of appetite, liver inflammation.
Diagnosed by: blood test.
Treatment:
- Hepatitis A = virus clears on its own.
- Hepatitis B = virus clears on its own or antiviral drugs needed.
- Hepatitis C = antiviral drugs.

Herpes

Symptoms: sores around genital area or mouth that are painful, itchy or tingle.
Diagnosed by: physical examination, genital or oral swab.
Treatment: antiviral drugs if the infection doesn't clear on its own.

Syphilis

Symptoms: ulcers, sores, rash, swollen glands.
Diagnosed by: blood test or swab from a sore.
Treatment: injection of antibiotics.

Know your rights

You have the right to:

- patient confidentiality
- refuse a sexual health check up
- request the clinic contacts your previous partners on your behalf
- use a condom.

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