

All about STI's and how to protect yourself

What is an STD?

A Sexually Transmissible Infection (STI) is a general term given to any infection that can be passed from one person to another during sexual activity.



How are STI's spread?

Microscopic organisms, (viruses, bacteria or parasites), that are passed from one partner to another during vaginal, anal or oral sex cause most STI's. Some STI's are caused by larger organisms (like lice or mites) which can be passed on during sexual or intimate contact.

What are the common signs and symptoms of STI's?

There are many different STI's – there are also many possible signs and symptoms to look for, **and sometimes there are no signs at all.**

Common signs and symptoms that may indicate an infection are:

- ? Unusual discharge of any type, from the penis or vagina
- ? Pain or irritation when passing urine or having sexual intercourse
- ? Sores, blisters, ulcers, warts, lumps or rashes – anywhere in the genital or anal area
- ? Itchiness or irritation in the genital or anal area
- ? Deep pelvic pain

Some of these signs may have other causes but, if you have any of them, it is important that you see a doctor as soon as possible.

DON'T JUST WAIT FOR THEM TO GO AWAY.

Even if the signs go away, it does **not** mean that the disease has gone and, you may still be able to infect people you have sex with.

How are STI's treated?

Most STI's are able to be treated.

It is important to see a doctor if you think that you may be infected.

Before an STI can be treated a doctor must diagnose it. This may involve taking swabs or a blood test.

Sometimes infected people may have more than one STI at a time. Treatment of STI's often involves a course of antibiotic prescribed by a doctor. This should be taken according to instructions or the infection may recur. Some STI's are treated with creams or lotions.

How to avoid STI's:

Major health organisations around the world recommend condoms as the most effective means of preventing STI's.

Some of the common and important STI's:

1. Chlamydia

In women, chlamydia infects the cervix. The cervix is the opening to the uterus (or womb).

In men, chlamydia infects the urethra (the inside of the penis).

For men and women, symptoms of chlamydia infection include:

- ? Unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- ? Burning or stinging when passing urine
- ? Pain with sexual intercourse

Often there are no signs or symptoms.

Chlamydia infection may lead to Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (see PID).

2. Genital Herpes

Genital herpes infection usually causes an outbreak of sores in the genital or anal area. Sometimes there are no symptoms.

In women, sores may appear on the vulva or walls of the vagina, and occasionally on the cervix.

In men, sores may appear around the head of shaft of the penis.

Sores may also appear around the anus in both men and women.

Before the sores appear, there may be other symptoms, such as:

- ? Pain, tingling or itching and redness on the affected site
- ? General aches, pains, fever
- ? Depression or moodiness

3. Genital Warts

Genital warts appear as small, painless lumps (warts) on the penis, vulva or cervix, or in and around the anus.

The warts can be very small.

On the penis they are usually visible, but genital warts on women, or anal warts in either sex, may be so small that some people carry them without knowing.

Infection with wart virus can also occur without the development of actual warts.

Once infected with genital wart virus (of if a partner has genital warts), women should have pap smears every 6 months (or advised by a doctor).

Genital warts can reappear and undetected infection may lead to cancer.

4. Gonorrhoea

The symptoms of gonorrhoea infection are very similar to those of chlamydia. If left untreated, gonorrhoea may lead to:

- ? Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in women
- ? Swelling and pain in the testicles of men
- ? Sterility in both males and females

5. Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B virus infects the liver.

Hepatitis B can also be passed on by sharing needles and syringes.

Signs of Hepatitis B infection include:

- ? Jaundice (yellowing of the skin of eyes)
- ? Fever
- ? Loss of appetite
- ? Tiredness
- ? Pain in the joints

The illness may be slight or severe.

Severe cases of hepatitis may cause permanent live damage.

Hepatitis B is the only STI that might be prevented with a vaccine.

The vaccine involves a course of injections that can be easily arranged by a doctor.

6. HIV/AIDS

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus. If HIV enters the blood stream of a person, it attacks the white blood cells that make up part of the immune system of the body.

The immune system protects the body against disease. HIV gradually stops the immune systems from working properly.

Up to 10 years or more after infection with HIV, the immune system may become so weak it can no longer resist even common illnesses.

When life-threatening infections occur as a result of HIV, the illness is known as AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

For more information: see the Ansell Education Service' information leaflet "What you need to know about HIV/AIDS and Safer Sex.

7. Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

PID is a term used for infection of a women's internal reproductive organs.

The infection begins in the cervix and spreads upwards into the internal organs – the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries.

The most common causes of PID are chlamydia and gonorrhoea infections.

The signs and symptoms of PID include:

- ? Lower abdominal and pelvic pain
- ? Deep pain with sexual intercourse
- ? Menstrual disturbances
- ? Fever

PID can also cause chronic abdominal pain and may lead to INFERTILITY.

8. Syphilis

Syphilis is recognised by a painless sore on the penis, in the vagina, rectum or throat. The sore may not be noticed and clear up in a few weeks. Later signs of syphilis include a rash on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet, or a flu-like illness. Syphilis is easily treated with antibiotics.

Untreated syphilis can cause serious illness many years later.

9. Trichomoniasis

In men, there may be no signs at all.

In women, trichomoniasis causes a frothy yellowish green discharge with a very unpleasant smell. The vaginal opening may feel itchy and intercourse is usually painful.