

# STI/Condom week 2014



STI/Condom Week is a health awareness event held between the 9th and 15th of February each year to highlight the importance of condom usage and inform people about the transmission of sexually transmitted infections.

A sexually transmitted infection, or STI, is a disease (bacteria, virus, or parasite) that is usually passed from one person to another through sexual activity. This does not necessarily have to include penetration, as some STIs are passed from skin to skin contact. STIs can also be transmitted from mother to child during birth as well as from blood transfusions and from sharing needles in hypodermic syringes.

STIs are a major health concern in South Africa and over four million people receive treatment for STIs every year. However, many people do not report them to the doctor as they should.

## How do I know if I have an STI?

The symptoms of an STI vary depending on the infection that has been contracted. Certain STIs may not even cause any symptoms at all, making it difficult for it to be diagnosed. However, there are a number of symptoms that may point to an STI, including pain during urination, sores or bumps in the oral, genital, or rectal areas, unusual vaginal discharge or bleeding, swollen lymph nodes or glands, and lower abdominal pain.

## How can you protect yourself?

You can reduce your chances of exposure to STIs in several ways:

- Have sex with a partner who has been tested

for an STI and who only has sex with you. The more partners you have, the more likely you are to be exposed to an STI.

- Having sex without a condom is one of the greatest causes of contracting STIs. It is vital that you use a condom at all times when having sexual intercourse.
- Previous infections with one or more STIs make it easier for a new STI to develop in your body. You and your partner can also re-infect one another with an STI if you do not get yourselves tested and treated regularly.
- Always ensure sterile or new needles are used and never share drug-using equipment.

## Condoms and STIs

The risk of getting STIs can be greatly reduced if a condom is used properly. Consistent and correct use of condoms can reduce (not eliminate) the risk of STI transmission and provide maximum protective support. Inconsistent use can lead to STI acquisition because transmission can occur with a single act of intercourse with an infected partner.

Most STIs can be cured if diagnosed and treated early. All of them can be prevented, however, through responsible sexual behaviour. Speak to your doctor for more information about the correct use of condoms and for more information about STIs.