

Sexually transmitted infections



According to the World Health Organisation, there are an estimated 357 million new infections every year with one of four of these STIs: chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and trichomoniasis. This STI/Condom Week, educate yourself on the facts.

A sexually transmitted infection (STI) is a disease (bacteria, virus, or parasite) that is predominantly passed from one person to another through sexual activity, including vaginal, anal, and oral sex. Some STIs can also be spread through non-sexual means (such as via blood or blood products) and many can also be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy and childbirth.

Common STIs to be aware of:

- **HIV:** HIV wears down your immune system so that your body is unable to fight other infections and cancers.
- **Chlamydia:** Chlamydia can cause a severe infection and lead to infertility in women.
- **Gonorrhoea:** Affects men and women and common symptoms include a pus-like discharge from the vagina or penis, painful urination, and (in women) bleeding between periods.
- **Syphilis:** Syphilis initially appears as a painless sore on the genitals or around the mouth, lasting about two to six weeks. It then causes an erratic skin rash and sore throat.
- **Trichomoniasis:** This is caused by infection with a protozoan parasite called *Trichomonas vaginalis* and some of the symptoms can range from mild irritation to severe inflammation.
- **Genital warts:** These appear as little bumps

or growths in the genital and/or anal area of the body.

- **Genital herpes:** Herpes sufferers experience bursts of painful sores or blisters in the genital area from time to time. It is the leading cause of genital ulcer disease and also increases the risk of HIV transmission.

Testing, signs, and symptoms

If you're sexually active, particularly with multiple partners, it's suggested that you frequently test for STIs (every 3 to 6 months) because anyone who has unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex can contract an STI.

Although you can have an STI without having obvious signs, common symptoms of STIs to look out for include vaginal discharge, urethral discharge or burning in men, genital ulcers, and abdominal pain.

Reduce your STI risk

Always wear a condom as unprotected sex is one of the greatest causes of contracting STIs. You can further reduce your chances of contracting an STI by only having sex with a partner who has recently been tested for STIs and who only has sex with you.