



Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)





What are STIs?

STIs are infections that are commonly spread by close sexual contact especially vaginal intercourse, anal or oral sex. While usually spread by sex, some STIs can also be spread by non-sexual contact with contaminated blood and tissues, breastfeeding or childbirth.

How do you get an STI?

Testing for STIs is free and confidential. Testing may be performed on a urine sample or swab to detect chlamydia, gonorrhoea, trichomonas or herpes, depending on the site of infection. Blood tests are available which detect antibodies to HIV and syphilis. HPV testing may be performed in women with abnormal PAP smears. Due to the wide spectrum of STIs, there is no one test to detect them all.



Common STIs and their symptoms

There are more than 20 known STIs and some will cause symptoms that you should see your doctor about immediately. However, you must ensure you get tested for STIs if you have unprotected genital, oral or anal sex as some of these infections can be 'silent' where there are no noticeable symptoms.

Below are the most common STIs:

- **Gonorrhoea:** You may notice discharge however you may not experience any symptoms at all.
- **Chlamydia:** This is typically a 'silent' infection yet the most common STI in Australia. Only around one in four people with the infection show symptoms of stinging when passing urine and discharge.
- **Syphilis:** This bacterial infection is easily missed. A painless sore or blister will disappear on its own, but it can be passed to others for up to eighteen months after this time.
- **Trichomonas:** This parasite may or may not cause stinging when passing urine and watery discharge.
- **Human Papillomavirus (HPV):** A person may notice genital warts with this virus and some strains are linked with cervical cancer.
- **Genital Herpes:** A person will notice recurrent, periodic outbreaks of genital sores.
- **Hepatitis B and C**
- **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)**

How are STIs diagnosed?

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Treatment

Some STIs can be treated with antibiotics, such as gonorrhoea, chlamydia and syphilis. However, if left untreated, these infections can have serious health consequences, including stillbirth, infertility and organ damage. This is why early detection is so important. Other STIs including herpes, HIV and hepatitis B can be managed with antiviral drugs.

Resistance of STIs to antibiotics has increased rapidly in recent years and reduced treatment options mean that prevention and prompt treatment is essential.

Vaccines

Safe and highly effective vaccines are available for hepatitis B and HPV.