

# STIs

Our short guide to all the important stuff you should know!

**STI stands for Sexually Transmissible Infection, which is an infection that can be passed to another person through vaginal, oral or anal sex. Some STIs are also passed on through sharing sex toys or skin-to-skin contact.**

## Preventing STIs

There are many ways you can help protect yourself and your partner/s from getting an STI. Condoms, water-based lubricants and dental dams are perfect when engaging in vaginal, anal or oral sex. And ensure you test regularly.

Vaccinations can help prevent infections such as Hepatitis A and B or HPV (Human Papillomavirus). There are also preventative medications such as PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) but you'll need to speak with your doctor about these as they're not suitable for everyone.

## Testing

It is recommended that you test for STIs every 6–12 months or:

- > when you change sexual partners
- > if you're showing symptoms
- > if you have a condom break or another occasion of concern
- > if someone you've been sexually active with tells you they've tested positive for an STI.

STI testing involves self-collected samples that may include a urine sample or vaginal swab. Depending on your partner/s and the type of sex you're engaging in, you may also need a throat swab and/or rectal swab. Blood tests are also a good idea.

If you have a Medicare card, the cost of a standard STI test is covered by Medicare.

Want to know where to get tested in Australia? Head to [Play Safe](#) and follow the 'Where can I get tested?' tab on the home page to find the best option for you.

## What if I test positive for an STI?

Testing positive for an STI says nothing about you as a person. There are steps you can take to reduce the risk of infection and transmission to others

## Did you know?

- > Approximately 1 in 8 sexually active Australians has genital herpes (Family Planning NSW)
- > In Australia, chlamydia and gonorrhoea rates are highest among those aged 15–29 years ([sti.guidelines.org.au](http://sti.guidelines.org.au), 2021)

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STI	Symptoms	Prevention
<b>Chlamydia</b>	Typically has no symptoms but, if you notice something, it may be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; pain passing urine</li> <li>&gt; unusual discharge</li> <li>&gt; itching</li> <li>&gt; pain in the lower abdomen</li> <li>&gt; pain during sex</li> <li>&gt; bleeding between periods or after sex</li> <li>&gt; testicular pain or swelling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Condoms</li> <li>&gt; Regular STI testing every 6–12 months</li> <li>&gt; If you test positive, abstain from sex and follow the directions of your clinician</li> </ul>
<b>Gonorrhoea</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Unusual discharge from penis, vagina or rectum</li> <li>&gt; Pain or burning when urinating</li> <li>&gt; Pain in the lower abdomen</li> <li>&gt; Pain during sex</li> <li>&gt; Bleeding between periods or after sex</li> <li>&gt; Itching or soreness</li> <li>&gt; Testicular pain or swelling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Condoms</li> <li>&gt; Regular STI testing</li> <li>&gt; If you test positive, abstain from sex and follow the directions of your clinician</li> </ul>
<b>Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)</b>	Sometimes you can have no symptoms or they are mild: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Tingling, itching or stinging</li> <li>&gt; Blisters that become sores</li> <li>&gt; Flu-like symptoms, especially in the first episode</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Avoid physical contact when symptoms are present, e.g. cold sores, blisters or sores</li> <li>&gt; Use condoms and dental dams to reduce the risk</li> <li>&gt; Taking daily antiviral medications can help decrease the risk of passing herpes on to your partner</li> </ul>
<b>HPV / Genital warts (Human papillomavirus)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Sometimes no symptoms</li> <li>&gt; Warts on genital area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; HPV vaccination, Gardasil, protects from the nine most common strains of HPV – some of these cause genital warts and others can lead to genital cancers</li> <li>&gt; Using condoms and dental dams can help but they're not 100% effective</li> <li>&gt; If you have a cervix, make sure you get a cervical screening test at appropriate times. Speak to your clinician to learn more or visit <a href="#">this link</a></li> </ul>
<b>Syphilis</b>	Syphilis has three stages: primary, secondary and tertiary. Different stages could show different symptoms. Some include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; painless sore or ulcer</li> <li>&gt; rashes, especially on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet</li> <li>&gt; flu-like symptoms</li> </ul> If someone is positive for syphilis, they can still pass it on to others even when no symptoms are present.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Condoms and dental dams</li> <li>&gt; Regular testing</li> <li>&gt; Abstain from sex if symptoms are present or if someone is receiving treatment</li> </ul>
<b>HIV (Human immunodeficiency virus)</b>	Symptoms can vary in every case and can be mild or severe. Symptoms can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; flu-like symptoms, e.g. fever, rash, swollen glands or muscle aches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Condoms</li> <li>&gt; PrEP (Pre-exposure Prophylaxis) or PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis) – discuss with your doctor</li> <li>&gt; If using injecting equipment, always ensure it is sterile</li> <li>&gt; See <a href="#">this list</a> for your nearest Needle Syringe Program (NSP) in NSW</li> </ul>
<b>Hepatitis B</b>	There aren't always symptoms but when they are present they can look like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; fever</li> <li>&gt; vomiting</li> <li>&gt; joint pain</li> <li>&gt; fatigue</li> <li>&gt; yellowing of the eyes or skin (jaundice)</li> <li>&gt; dark urine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Use condoms</li> <li>&gt; Vaccinate against Hepatitis B</li> <li>&gt; Don't share razors or toothbrushes</li> <li>&gt; Always use sterile injecting equipment – see the list above for your nearest NSP</li> </ul>

## STI testing is embarrassing

STI testing is healthy and normal and should be a common practice in everyone's life. Your doctor has seen it all so they won't be shocked or embarrassed by what you have to say or ask.





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## Common STI Myths...

### STI testing is embarrassing

STI testing is healthy and normal and should be a common practice in everyone's life. Your doctor has seen it all so they won't be shocked or embarrassed by what you have to say or ask.

### Only gay men can get HIV

HIV can be transmitted to people of all genders and sexualities.

### They said they didn't have an STI

STIs can show no symptoms, meaning sometimes people don't know if they're infected. Keep yourself safe, always use a condom and don't forget to get tested regularly.

### STI testing is painful

STI testing should be quick, easy and painless. It generally involves peeing into a cup or taking a self-collected swab. Sometimes a blood test is a great idea too.

### If I get an STI, it means I'm dirty

STIs are extremely common and cross every sexual, social, economic, racial, religious and ethnic barrier. Getting one doesn't say anything about you as a person.

### I didn't have penetrative sex so I can't get an STI

STIs can spread through bodily fluids or skin-to-skin contact, meaning you can get an STI from any type of sex, including anal, oral, fingering or sharing sex toys.

### I've already had an STI, I can't get it again

STIs can be contracted again and again and again. Having an infection once won't stop you from getting it again.

### I'm on contraception so I can't get an STI

The only contraception that gives protection against STIs and pregnancy is a condom.

### Double the condom, double the protection

Using more than one condom can cause the condom to break down due to the friction between them. Only ever use one condom at a time.

