

A young man and woman are shown in a close, intimate embrace, nearly kissing. The woman has long blonde hair and is looking up at the man. The man has short brown hair and is looking down at her. They are outdoors, with a blurred background of greenery and a concrete wall. A white speech bubble with a pink border is positioned over the man's chest, containing the text 'SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS' in pink capital letters.

**SEXUALLY
TRANSMITTED
INFECTIONS**

STIs

**what you need
to know**



STI

figures continue
to increase
every year

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are infections that require direct contact to be spread from one person to another.

They survive poorly outside the human body. They are almost exclusively transmitted by sexual contact. Most are transmitted through semen and vaginal fluids with the exception of HIV (blood) and HSV/HPV (skin-to-skin contact).

Over 25 STIs have been identified. Other terms used for STIs include venereal diseases and sexually transmitted diseases.

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is the most common STI in the UK. It is transmitted via vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Symptoms in women:

Research suggests 70-80% of women don't notice any symptoms and so they don't know they have it. If women do get symptoms, the most common include:

- pain when urinating
- a change in vaginal discharge
- pain in the lower abdomen
- bleeding between periods
- heavier periods than usual

Diagnosis and treatment:

Detected via a urine or swab test and treated with antibiotics.

Long Term:

If left untreated in women chlamydia can spread to the womb and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) which is a major cause of infertility, miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy (when a fertilised egg implants itself outside of the womb). If left untreated in men chlamydia puts them at risk of swollen testicles, inflammation of the joints, and infertility.

Gonorrhoea

The bacteria are found mainly in discharge from the penis and vaginal fluid from infected men and women.

Gonorrhoea is easily passed between people through vaginal, oral or anal sex. If you are pregnant gonorrhoea can be passed to your baby during birth.

Symptoms in women:

Around half of infected women don't experience any symptoms but those who do experience:

- an unusual discharge from the vagina
- pain when passing urine
- pain or tenderness in the lower abdominal area (this is less common)
- bleeding between or heavier periods (this is less common)

Diagnosis and treatment:

Diagnosed via a swab test and treated with antibiotics.

Long Term:

If treated early, gonorrhoea is unlikely to lead to any complications or long-term problems. However, without treatment it can spread to other parts of your body and cause serious problems. The more times that you have gonorrhoea, the more likely you are to get complications.

Symptoms in men:

Nine out of 10 men who contract gonorrhoea experience symptoms after they are infected, which can include:

- an unusual discharge from the tip of the penis
- pain or a burning sensation when urinating
- inflammation (swelling) of the foreskin
- pain or tenderness in the testicles or prostate gland (this is rare)

- In women, gonorrhoea can spread to the reproductive organs and cause pelvic inflammatory disease.
- In men, gonorrhoea can cause painful infection in the testicles and prostate gland, which may lead to reduced fertility.

Genital herpes (HSV)

Is a chronic long-term condition caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV). HSV is highly contagious and can be passed easily from one person to another by direct contact. Genital herpes is usually transmitted by having sex (vaginal, anal or oral) with an infected person. HPV is spread by skin-to-skin contact. Even if someone with genital herpes does not have any symptoms, it is possible for them to pass the condition on to a sexual partner.

Symptoms:

Painful blisters on the genitals and the surrounding areas.

Diagnosis and treatment:

There's no cure for genital herpes, but the symptoms can usually be effectively controlled using antiviral medicines. The symptoms of genital herpes tend to become less frequent and less severe with each recurring episode of the condition.

Long Term:

Effects can be more psychological than physical as the symptoms can reappear without warning. Anyone with a positive herpes diagnosis will need to discuss this with future sexual partners.

Genital Warts

Genital warts are the result of a viral skin infection caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). You don't need to have penetrative sex to pass the infection on because HPV is spread by skin-to-skin contact.

Symptoms:

- Warts (small fleshy growths, bumps or skin changes) appear on or around the genital or anal area. Warts are usually painless, although some people may experience symptoms of itchiness and irritation.
- A person can have a single wart, or clusters of multiple warts that grow together to form a kind of 'cauliflower' appearance.
- Some people experience bleeding from the warts during sex.

Diagnosis and treatment:

Genital warts requires a medical diagnosis as treatments are prescription only and some treatments need to be carried out by a medical professional. Several treatments are available, such as creams and cryotherapy (freezing the warts).

Long Term:

The human papilloma virus (HPV) is not a single virus, but a family of over 100 different strains of viruses. However, some types of HPV can disrupt the normal functioning of the cells of the cervix. This causes them to reproduce uncontrollably and trigger the onset of cancer.

HPV vaccination:

None of the available vaccines provide complete protection against all the types of HPV that are known to cause cervical cancer nor do they prevent the spread of other STIs.

Syphilis

The bacteria that cause syphilis can enter your body if you have close contact with an infected sore, normally during vaginal, anal or oral sex

Symptoms:

The symptoms of syphilis develop in three stages:

- Stage 1 (primary syphilis) – Symptoms of syphilis begin with a painless but highly infectious sore on the genitals or sometimes around the mouth. These usually last for two to six weeks before disappearing.
- Stage 2 (secondary syphilis) – Secondary symptoms, such as skin rash and sore throat, then develop. These symptoms may disappear within a few weeks, after which you experience a latent (hidden) phase with no symptoms, which can last for years.

Diagnosis and treatment:

If diagnosed early, syphilis can be easily treated with antibiotics, usually penicillin injections. The earlier syphilis is treated, the less chance there is of serious complications.

Long Term:

If left to progress untreated, Stage 3 (tertiary syphilis) will develop. At this stage, it can cause serious damage to the body, serious conditions such as stroke, paralysis, blindness or death.

Hiv

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is found in the body fluids of an infected person, which includes semen and vaginal fluids, blood, inside the anus and breast milk.

The most common ways of getting HIV in the UK are:

- having vaginal, oral and anal sex
- using a contaminated needle or syringe to inject drugs
- from mother to baby, before or during birth, or by breastfeeding

The virus enters the bloodstream, often through cuts and sores, and attacks the immune system, which protects the body against infection.

Symptoms:

Many people newly infected with HIV have no signs or symptoms at all.

Diagnosis and treatment:

The only way to find out if you have HIV is to have an HIV test. If you think you might be at risk of HIV, you should have a test immediately.

Long term:

The virus weakens your ability to fight infections and cancer. AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection, when your body can no longer fight life-threatening infections. Although there's no cure for HIV treatments are much more successful than they used to be, enabling people with HIV to lead as normal a life as possible.



help yourself

The following methods will reduce the risk of infection:

- Not having sex
- Reducing your number of sexual partners
- Knowing the sexual history of your partner
- Avoiding high risk partners

The condom can minimise the risk of contracting some STIs such as chlamydia, however they cannot remove the risk entirely. Some estimates of user failure rate are as high as 20% and even higher in teenagers.

They offer little protection against herpes and genital warts as it is possible for the skin around the genitals to become infected and the condom doesn't cover this area.

Think you may have an STI? Get yourself checked out.

Even if you have been successfully treated for a bacterial STI you can still catch it again.

The way we behave sexually has an impact on everyone, often in ways that we have never thought about:

“It’s clear that not enough people are taking care of their sexual health”

(Department of Health, May 2012)



where to go for help

If you have been or are sexually active it is advisable to go to your GP, sexual health or genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic for a free confidential test. Remember not all STIs show symptoms so to be sure you need to get checked!

**If you haven't been
checked don't put
anyone else at risk.**



**respect yourself
respect others**

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