

THE BASIC FACTS ABOUT STIs

What are Sexually Transmitted Infections?

Sexually transmitted infections (sometimes called STIs) are infections that can be passed from one person to another person during sexual activity. Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Genital Herpes, Genital Warts, HIV, Pubic Lice and Syphilis are some of the STIs you may have heard about.

STIs can be passed on through all types of sex: - vaginal, anal and oral sex as well as masturbation/fingering or sharing sex toys with someone who has an infection.

They can affect anyone who is sexually active – whether you're straight, lesbian, gay or bisexual.

STIs can cause discomfort, embarrassment and irritation; however they can also have longer term effects on our bodies and our health including infertility, lifelong illnesses and in some cases even death.

Signs and Symptoms

Some people may have very obvious symptoms which could include:

- Rashes and itches around the genital area, (the penis or vagina) the anus (bottom) or on the skin
- Lumps, sores and growths around the genitals, in and around the anus or in the mouth
- A smelly or unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- Pain when going to the toilet
- Pain when having sex

Some STIs (like Chlamydia and HIV) may have no symptoms at all but can cause long term damage to our bodies

How can we prevent STIs?

You can avoid getting many STIs by having safer sex – that is using a condom for vaginal, anal and oral sex.

For heterosexual couples, condoms can also help prevent unwanted pregnancies.

You can get free condoms from most sexual health clinics.

Getting tested and treated

Many STIs are curable and all are treatable - so if you think you may have an infection or if you have had unprotected sex then it may be best to have a sexual health check-up.

You can get information about STIs and access STI screening and treatment at your local sexual health service. These services are confidential and the tests they do are not painful - in fact many are now done from urine or blood samples.

Remember sex should be pleasurable and fun. Knowing that we are looking after our sexual health by protecting ourselves and our partners from STIs can take away some worries about sex so that we can relax and enjoy it more.

How to use a condom

With all condoms make sure:-

- The condom is in date (most condoms have an expiry date)
- You only use condoms that have a CE mark or a BSI kite mark on the packet
- You put the condom in place before there is any genital contact between you and your partner(s)
- You open the condom carefully so as not to damage it - be careful with nails and sharp jewellery that could tear the condom
- You use the condom only once – never use the same one for a second time
- You use water based lubricants with latex condoms – oil based ones can damage the condom
- During sex you should check from time to time that the condom is still in place and has not been damaged
- After ejaculation, hold the base of the condom so that it doesn't come off during withdrawal. Then carefully remove the condom to avoid spillage
- **If a condom breaks or comes off during sex, contact your local sexual health service or your GP for advice**