



Sexually Transmissible Infections

Myth:
I would know if I had an STI.

Fact:

The signs of having an STI are not always obvious - many STIs have no symptoms. It is not always possible to tell if you or the person you are having sex with has an STI. The only way to know if you have an STI is to get tested.

Myth:
If I use a condom when having sex, I am protected against all STIs.

Fact:

If you are sexually active, condoms are the best form of protection against STIs, but they do not prevent all STIs. You can lower your risk of getting an STI by always using condoms or other barrier protection when having sex and also getting tested for STIs regularly, including every time you change sexual partners or have unprotected sex.

Myth:
I'm careful about who I choose to have sex with so I'm unlikely to get an STI.

Fact:

You can't tell if someone has an STI. STIs don't discriminate - anyone who is sexually active can get an STI and if you are having unprotected sex you are at even greater risk.

Myth:
It is shameful to have an STI.

Fact:

Having an STI is nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. STIs are very common. Most people who are sexually active will get an STI at some point - often during early adulthood.

STIs: It's time to talk.

- STIs are bacterial, viral and parasitic infections that are passed from person to person during sexual activity. You can get an STI by having vaginal, anal or oral sex with someone else who is already infected.
- Some STIs can cause pain and discomfort but not all STIs have obvious symptoms. Left untreated STIs can lead to serious and long-term health problems, and while untreated, you may be spreading your infection to others.
- Most STIs are acquired through exposure to infected bodily fluids (blood, saliva, semen or vaginal fluid) during unprotected penetrative sex. It is also possible to get an STI by touching the body fluid of an infected person with your fingers, sharing sex toys or genital skin to skin contact (eg. human papillomavirus).
- Having unprotected sex even once is enough to put you at risk of contracting an STI.
- There are many *different STIs*. Chlamydia and gonorrhoea are two of the most common STIs contracted by young people. Infection rates for both these STIs are increasing in Victoria and across Australia.
- The best way to avoid getting an STI - and to help reduce the spread of STIs - is to practice *safer sex* by always using a condom or other barrier protection for sex and to get tested for STIs regularly.

Having sex? Get tested, regularly.

- Regular STI testing is an important and normal part of looking after your sexual health.
- If you are under the age of thirty and sexually active, you should get tested for STIs at least once a year. You should also get tested if you might have been exposed to an STI, for example by having unprotected sex, or if you notice any symptoms. You should also get tested every time you change sexual partners.
- STI testing is quick, easy and confidential. Most STIs are tested via urine, blood or a throat or anal swab. It's important to tell your health practitioner what type(s) of sex you have had - oral, vaginal or anal sex, or a combination.
- You can access free STI testing from bulk-billing GPs, community health centres, sexual health clinics and family planning clinics. To find your nearest health service, visit: [StaySTIFree](#) or [1800MyOptions](#). If you are under the age of twenty-five and live in regional or rural Victoria, you can also go online and order a free test kit for chlamydia and gonorrhoea to be delivered to your home - just visit: [TESTme](#).
- STIs are treatable, some with antibiotics and others with antivirals.
- If you are diagnosed with an STI, it is important (and *respectful*) to also let your sexual partner(s) know so that they can get tested and if needed, get treatment too. You should also avoid having vaginal, anal or oral sex until you (and your partner) have been treated and are no longer infectious.

Heading out to party?

- Alcohol and other drugs can decrease our inhibitions, increase our confidence and impair our judgement and decision-making - all of which can increase the chances of having unsafe sex.
- You may take greater risks with your sexual health when you've been drinking alcohol or taken other drugs. Protect yourself from STIs by always carrying condoms or other barrier protection when you go out.