

# STIs 101

STI stands for sexually transmitted infection. STIs are very common - anyone can be at risk for STIs whether you're straight or LGBTQ, or have one sexual partner or more than one sexual partner. Most STIs are treatable or at least manageable.

## What are the 3 different kinds of STIs?

- **Bacterial** STIs like gonorrhea and chlamydia can be cured with medication.
- **Viral** STIs like Herpes and HIV cannot be cured but symptoms can be treated.
- **Parasite** STIs like scabies or pubic lice can be cured with skin medication.

## Transmission

- You must engage in sexual activity with someone who has an STI in order to get an STI.
- Most STIs are transmitted when vaginal\* fluid, anal fluid, semen (cum) or pre-cum from someone with an STI enter/go inside your vagina, penis\*, anus or mouth.
- Some STIs, like HIV, are also transmitted when blood from someone with those STIs gets into your bloodstream through open sores, cuts, tiny tears and veins.
- Herpes and HPV (low-risk HPV and high-risk HPV) are transmitted through skin to skin contact, particularly genital skin to genital skin contact.

## Symptoms

- The most common symptom of all STIs is no symptom at all.
- Many STIs share common symptoms such as unusual discharge from the penis or vagina, or bumps or sores in and around the genitals.
- What's most important is to pay attention to your body. If something seems unusual to you, get it checked out at a sexual health clinic or with your clinician.

*\*We know that these aren't the words everyone uses for their bodies (eg. trans folks), and support you using the language that feels best for you.*

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**planned parenthood toronto health services**  
offers drop-in and scheduled appointments.  
call 416-961-0113 or visit [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)

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## Want to reduce your risk? Here's some things to try:

- If you can, ask partners about their STI history and if they've been tested. Get tested yourself when you and/or your partner has a new sexual partner. If you have new partners often, try to get tested every 3-6 months.
- Use condoms for oral, vaginal or anal sex with a penis or dildo.
- Use gloves for vaginal or anal sex with fingers/fists.
- Use condoms cut up one side or dental dams for oral-vaginal or oral-anal sex. Using non-micro-waveable plastic wrap can also reduce your risk.
- There are vaccines to prevent hepatitis B and some strains of HPV. Talk to your clinician for more information.
- Using condoms, dams and gloves is the most effective but it can also help to: use withdrawal (pull out), avoid having sex when you're menstruating, don't floss/brush your teeth just before oral sex, and avoid sex when you're really drunk or high.

## Testing

- Getting tested is a good way to take care of yourself and your partners. You may want to get tested when you or your partner(s) have a new partner(s).
  - o HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B are tested by taking your blood.
  - o Chlamydia and gonorrhea are tested in people with cervixes\*\* by a cervical swab or a urine test. In people with testicles\*\*, they are tested by a urine test.
  - o Herpes is tested by taking a swab (a q-tip) of the sore. Low-risk HPV (genital warts) is tested by a clinician's visual examination. You have to have a visible outbreak of sores or warts to get tested.
  - o A Pap test can detect the possibility of high-risk HPV (i.e. abnormal cells that could lead to cervical cancer) in people with ovaries. All people with cervixes over 21 who are sexually active (oral, vaginal or finger play) should have a pap test every 3 years.
- STIs have testing "windows" which means you have to wait a period of time after having sex before you can get an accurate test.
  - o For Chlamydia and gonorrhea, you can get an accurate test 24 hours after having sex.
  - o Things that require a blood test (like syphilis and HIV) can take between 2 weeks and 3 months to show up on a test.
  - o For Herpes and genital warts (low-risk HPV), you can only be tested when you have a visible outbreak of sores or warts.

*\*\* People with cervixes are usually designated female at birth while people with testicles are usually designated male at birth. People with testicles don't always identify as male and people with cervixes don't always identify as female.*

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- Be sure to ask your clinician what you are being tested for. Don't assume you have been tested for something (for example, having a pap test does not mean you have been tested for STIs). If you want to be tested for something in particular, ask explicitly.
- Some STIs are reportable. This means that if you test positive, anonymous follow-up with your past partners may be required. Talk to the clinician about this before you get tested.
- Each clinic books STI testing appointments differently. Ask the clinic for details.

## Treatment

- Curable STIs can usually be treated with antibiotics or topical treatments.
- If the STI you have cannot be cured, like herpes or HIV, you can get treatment to reduce your symptoms and take care of yourself.
- If you don't get tested and treated, there can be serious consequences for your health.

## Remember

- It's your right to get STI testing and to know what you are being tested for.
- Most STIs are curable or at least manageable. It's no fun to have an STI but it doesn't mean the end of your sex life if you test positive for one.
- Because many people can have STIs for a long time and not know it, it's not always easy to tell who you got the STI from. If you test positive for an STI, don't assume it's your current sexual partner(s).

## Want to get tested? Have other questions?

- Planned Parenthood Toronto offers testing for youth 13-29 years old: (416) 961-0113 or [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)
- The STC Clinic at the Bay Centre for Birth Control offers testing for people of all ages: (416) 351-3700 or [www.womenscollegehospital.ca/programs-and-services/bcbc/](http://www.womenscollegehospital.ca/programs-and-services/bcbc/)

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