



# Sexually Transmitted Infections

## Common Symptoms and Tips on Prevention

### *What are sexually transmitted infections?*

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections you can get by having sex with someone who has an infection. These infections are usually passed by having intercourse, but they can also be passed through anal sex, oral sex or skin-to-skin contact. STIs can be caused by viruses or bacteria. STIs caused by viruses include hepatitis B, herpes, HIV and the human papilloma virus (HPV). STIs caused by bacteria include chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis.

### *Am I at risk of having an STI?*

If you've ever had sex, you may be at risk of having an STI. Your risk is higher if you have had many sex partners, have had sex with someone who has had many partners or have had sex without using condoms. Some common symptoms of STIs are listed below.

### *Common signs/symptoms of STIs*

- Itching around the vagina and/or discharge from the vagina for women.
- Discharge from the penis for men.
- Pain during sex or when urinating.
- Pain in the pelvic area.
- Sore throats in people who had oral sex.
- Pain in or around the anus for people who have anal sex.
- Chancre sores (painless red sores) on the genital area, anus, tongue and/or throat.
- A scaly rash on the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet.
- Dark urine, loose, light-coloured stools, yellow eyes and skin.
- Small blisters that turn into scabs on the genital area.
- Swollen glands, fever and body aches.
- Unusual infections, unexplained fatigue, night sweats and weight loss.
- Soft, flesh-coloured warts around the genital area.

### *Should I be checked for STIs?*

See your doctor if you're at risk of having an STI, if you have any of the symptoms listed above or if you have concerns about whether you have an STI. STIs can cause problems if left untreated.

For example, chlamydia can lead to problems that can cause women not to be able to have children. HPV can lead to cancer of the cervix or penis, and syphilis can lead to paralysis, mental problems, heart damage, blindness and death.

### *How are STIs diagnosed?*

Most STIs can be diagnosed through an exam by a doctor, a culture of the secretions from your vagina or penis, or through a blood test.

### *Can STIs be prevented?*

Yes. The only sure way to prevent STIs is by not having sex. If you have sex, you can lower your risk of getting an STI by only having sex with someone who isn't having sex with anyone else and who doesn't have an STI.

You should always use a condom when having sex, including oral or anal sex.

### *What else should I do to prevent STIs?*

Limit the number of sex partners you have. Ask your partner if he or she has, or has had, an STI and tell your partner if you have had one. Talk about whether you've both been tested for STIs and whether you should be tested.

Look for signs of an STI in your sex partner. But remember that STIs don't always cause symptoms. Don't have sex if you or your partners are being treated for an STI.

Wash your genitals with soap and water and urinate soon after you have sex. This may help clean away some germs before they have a chance to infect you.

### *Do condoms prevent STIs?*

Male latex condoms can reduce your risk of getting an STI if used correctly. Be sure to use them every time you have sex. Female condoms aren't as effective as male condoms, but should be used when a man won't use a male condom.

Remember, though, that condoms aren't 100% safe and can't protect you from coming into contact with some sores, such as those that can occur with herpes, or warts, which can be caused by HPV infection.

## Condom Use

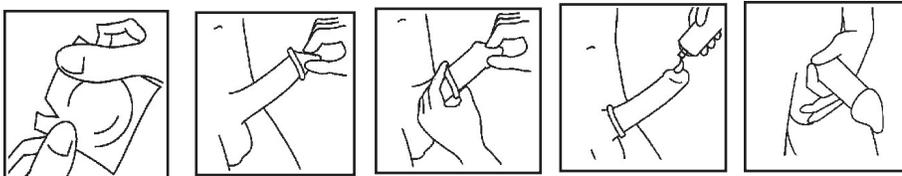
- ☑ Always use a condom for “safer sex.”
- ☑ Use a latex condom the first time and every time you have sex. Why? Bacteria and viruses cannot pass through a condom in either direction.
- ☑ Insist on using a condom when you have sex even if your partner says he or she is “safe.” Say no to anyone who is not willing to use condoms.

### How To Get Them

- You can buy condoms at any drugstore, off the shelf. You can get them for free at your local Health Unit.
- Always buy latex condoms.

### How To Use A Condom

- When used correctly, condoms can protect you and your partner against many sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea, warts, hepatitis B and syphilis.
- Condoms protect partners from STIs on the penis, vagina or in the semen. Sores and warts on other genital areas are still able to be passed from partner to partner even when a condom is used.
- Buy lubricated condoms and check the expiry date on the condom. Don't use expired condoms – they will break.
- Heat and cold can damage your condoms, so store them in a dark, cool place.
- Put the condom on before sex, and handle carefully to avoid tearing.
- Either partner can put the condom on the penis. Press the air out of the top, leaving enough space to hold the semen (about one centimetre).



- Unroll the condom over as much of the hard penis as possible.
- To avoid tearing the condom or irritation, use a water-based lubricant on the condom.
- Don't use oil-based products (like Vaseline) because they can weaken the condom and then it won't provide as much protection – it could even break.
- After sex, take the penis out of the vagina with the condom still on and the penis still hard. Hold the base of the condom firmly so that the semen doesn't spill.
- Tie a knot at the open end and dispose of the condom in the garbage.
- Always use a new condom each time you have sex.

*For more information, free condoms or STI testing for HIV, hepatitis A, B, C and syphilis, call any of the phone numbers listed below.*

*Adapted from Oxford County Board of Health.*

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