

• **What are sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?** Ans: Sexually transmitted infections are infections transmitted through sexual contact. STIs generally infect the genital area (penis, scrotum, vulva, and vaginal opening), but can also spread in the anus, or mouth. They can spread to other parts of the body if left untreated.

STIs are spread in two ways. The first is through bodily fluids, including blood, semen, pre-cum fluids, and vaginal secretions. The fluids are often passed from partner to partner during vaginal, oral, or anal sex. So, if you have any type of sex with someone who has an STI, you can get the infection.

Some STIs, such as warts or herpes, can also be spread through skin-to-skin contact. This means touching an infected person's genitals and then touching yourself, or rubbing with no clothes on against a person who has an STI. Oral herpes can also be spread through kissing, if an infected person has herpes-related sores on his or her mouth.

• **What are the different kinds of STIs?** Ans: There are three different kinds of sexually transmitted infections: bacterial, viral, and parasitic.

- Bacterial infections are caused by a germ or bacteria. They include chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. These can be cured by taking antibiotics.
- Viral infections are carried in a person's body and can't be cured by medicine. They include herpes, HPV, Hepatitis B and C, and HIV. The symptoms are sores, warts, or other health problems which can be treated, but the virus may stay with the person for life, and can be passed to partners.
- Parasitic infections are tiny bugs that live in the pubic hair and genital area. They include scabies and pubic lice ("crabs"). They can be spread during sexual contact and from sharing bath towels, bedding, and clothing. Scabies and lice are generally eliminated with prescription soap.

• **What are common symptoms of STIs?** Ans: Many sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have no symptoms. That's why many people don't even know they have an STI, because they feel and look totally healthy. But some STIs do produce symptoms. The most common ones are:

Girls:

- Pain or burning when you pee or have sex
- Bleeding between periods
- Red, irritated, or swollen genital skin
- Unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- Unexplained bleeding during intercourse
- Bumps, sores, or rashes in the genital area

Boys:

- Pain or burning when you pee or have sex
- Red, irritated, or swollen genital skin
- Unusual discharge from the penis
- Bumps, sores, or rashes in the genital area

• **How can you avoid getting an STI?** **Ans:** The only way to avoid getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI) is to abstain from sexual touching below the waist, such as rubbing bodies without clothes, vaginal sex, oral sex, and anal sex. Next is to practice safe sex and get tested regularly, and ask your partners to do the same.

chances of getting an STI can be reduced by following:

- Practice safer sex with each partner each time.
 - Get tested regularly, and ask your partners to do the same.
 - Know your partner well before having sex. Ask your partner if they've ever had an STI and if it was treated. Ask them when they last got tested and if they are willing to get tested again. Ask them if they practiced safer sex with past partners and if that included oral sex.
- Learn about STIs, how they are transmitted, and which activities are low-risk and which are high-risk so that you can make informed decisions about how to protect your sexual health. For example, kissing and massage are low-risk. Unprotected vaginal or anal sex is high-risk.
- Be smart when choosing your sexual partners. The more sexual partners you have, the greater your chances of getting an STI.
- Even if you're both declared infection-free, you should still use latex condoms every single time you have vaginal or anal sex.

• **Can you get an STI from oral sex?** **Ans:** Yes. Although the chance of getting or giving a sexually transmitted infection (STI) during oral sex is lesser than during vaginal or anal sex, it is still risky to have unprotected oral sex.

Many STIs infect warm, wet places, like your mouth, urethra, vulva, vagina, penis, and/or anus. This means that many STIs can be passed from your mouth to genitals and vice versa.

The STIs that can be passed during oral sex are herpes, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, and syphilis. There is a very small risk for getting and giving HIV through oral sex, too.

• **Can I get an STI or HIV from kissing?** **Ans:** Kissing is pretty safe. Herpes is the only sexually transmitted infection that can be passed through kissing. This usually happens when one person has an open sore on the mouth, lips or tongue and then kisses another person. So Don't kiss someone with open sores. And, if you have any sores, keep your tongue to yourself until they've cleared up.

A kiss can't spread other sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, chlamydia, genital warts and gonorrhea. You can't get pregnant from kissing, either.

• **What are the risks of anal intercourse?** **Ans:** Since the lining of the anus is very thin and can tear easily, it is much easier for a person to be exposed to a sexually transmitted infection during anal sex, if one partner is infected. Also, when a guy inserts his penis into a female partner's anus, and he ejaculates, the semen can drip into the vaginal opening, increasing her risk of becoming pregnant.

For these reasons, it is very important to ALWAYS use a lubricated latex or polyurethane

condom for anal intercourse. A penis or object should NEVER be inserted into the vagina after it has been inside the anus, without washing the penis or object first. Rectal bacteria can be very harmful if it gets inside the vagina.

• **Do I have to tell my partner(s) I have an STI or HIV?** **Ans:** Yes, you should discuss having an STI with your partner. You can explain to them what you understand the risks to be and options for having sex safely. Remember, just because your partner does not tell you that they have a STI, it doesn't mean they are not infected. Many people do not even know they have an STD.

• **How to test for STIs?** **Ans:** Doctors and health-care providers test for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in several ways. Depending on the symptoms, they might do a physical examination of the genitals; test samples of fluids from the vagina, anus, throat, and urethra; or do a urine test. They might also do a blood test for HIV, syphilis, or hepatitis.

• **Can STIs cause problems for me or my baby if I'm pregnant?** **Ans:** Yes. Some STIs can put your baby at risk of being born too early. Other STIs can be passed to your baby during birth. This can lead to problems for your baby, like blindness, breathing problems, or in rare situations, even death. Because of these risks to you or your baby, if you're pregnant, it's important to consider getting tested for all STIs, including HIV.

• **If I'm on the pill, can I still get an STI?** **Ans:** Yes. Birth control pills, and other birth control methods like the shot (Depo-Provera), the patch (OrthoEvra), and the ring (Nuvaring) are hormones designed to prevent pregnancy. These hormones don't protect against STIs. Women using the pill or other hormone birth control should still use condoms to protect themselves against infections.

• **Can I get an STI more than once?** **Ans:** Yes. Bacterial STIs like chlamydia and gonorrhea are curable. However, if you cure an STI, and then have sex with a partner who is infected, you can get it again.

• **What's the connection between HIV and other STIs?** **Ans:** When someone is diagnosed with one STI, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend testing for other STIs as well. The risk behavior that allowed transmission of one STI may also put a person at risk for others. STIs may also make a person more vulnerable to contracting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, since some STIs like herpes and syphilis may create sores that cause breaks in the skin. These breaks in the skin can let infected body fluids enter the body, increasing the risk of transmission. Healthy skin may act as a protective barrier to these fluids.