



# Sexually Transmitted Infections



Public Health  
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé  
publique du Canada

Canada 

***To promote and protect the health of  
Canadians through leadership, partnership  
and innovation and action in public health.***

– Public Health Agency of Canada.

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DISCLAIMER: In the writing of this booklet, a commitment was made to use inclusive language that is relevant to everyone. People use different terms to describe their genitals. This text uses medical terms, such as vagina and penis, to describe genitals. Cisgender people can often identify with these terms. Some transgender people may use other terms. We acknowledge and respect that people use words that they are most comfortable with.

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## What is an STI?

Sexually transmitted infections, commonly called STI for short, are infections you can get if you have vaginal, oral or anal sex or intimate skin-to-skin contact with someone.

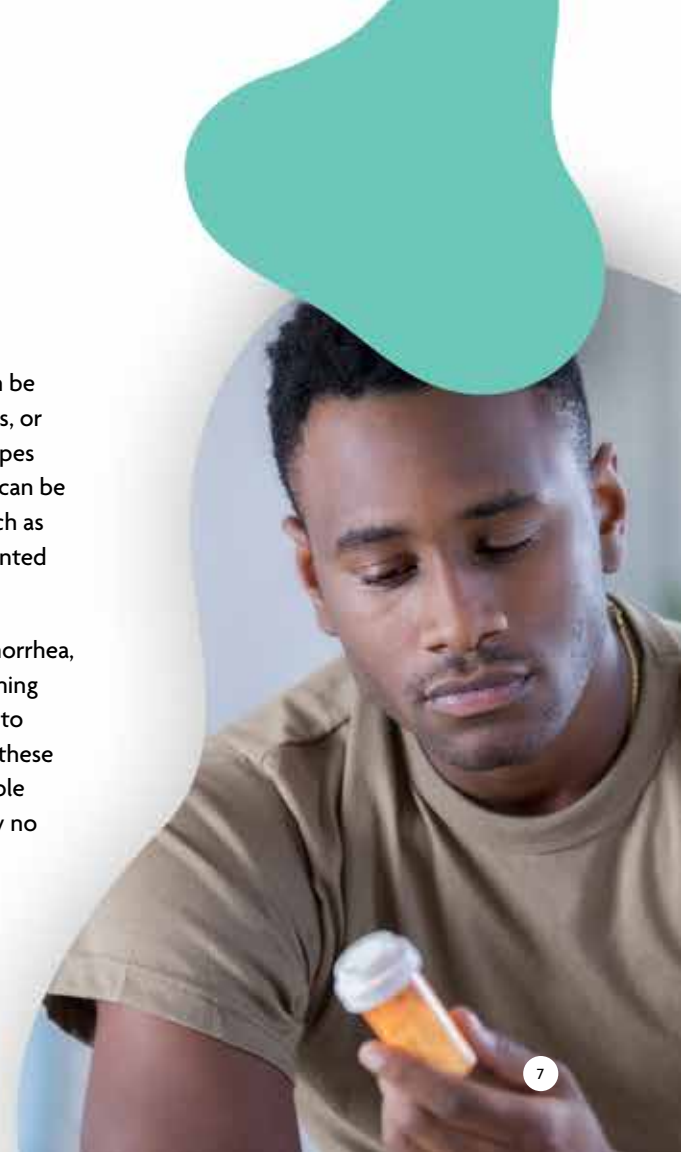
### What are some common STI?

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Syphilis
- Trichomoniasis
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
- Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)
- Hepatitis B
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

## Can STI be cured?

There are quite a few STI that can be treated and cured with antibiotics, or a combination of antibiotics. Herpes and HIV can't be cured, but they can be treated effectively. Other STI, such as hepatitis B and HPV can be prevented with vaccines.

However, some STI, including gonorrhea, syphilis, and chlamydia are becoming increasingly difficult to treat due to antibiotic resistance. This means these infections may become untreatable someday because antibiotics may no longer work.



## What are the long-term effects of an untreated STI?

If left untreated or if treatment is not completed, STI can persist or recur, and can cause serious health problems.



### **Long-term effects on your fertility and/or other gynaecological issues: (e.g. chlamydia, gonorrhoea)**

- Pelvic inflammatory disease which can cause abscesses and scarring in the vagina, uterus, ovaries and fallopian tubes.
- Ongoing pelvic pain, including painful periods.
- Challenges getting pregnant.
- Ectopic pregnancy, which is a pregnancy that occurs outside the uterus—usually in the fallopian tube. If left untreated the fallopian tube could rupture and cause bleeding that could be life-threatening.

*Make sexual health part of your routine health checkups. Consider whether you want to have sex, practise safer sex, and get tested regularly for STI if you are sexually active.*

**Long-term effects on your genital area or anus: (e.g. HPV, HSV, LGV)**

- Anogenital warts.
- Pre-cancerous or cancerous cells that can lead to cancers including cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus or throat and tongue.
- Scarring and/or deformity of the genitals or anus.
- Repeated outbreaks or persistence of the infection throughout life.

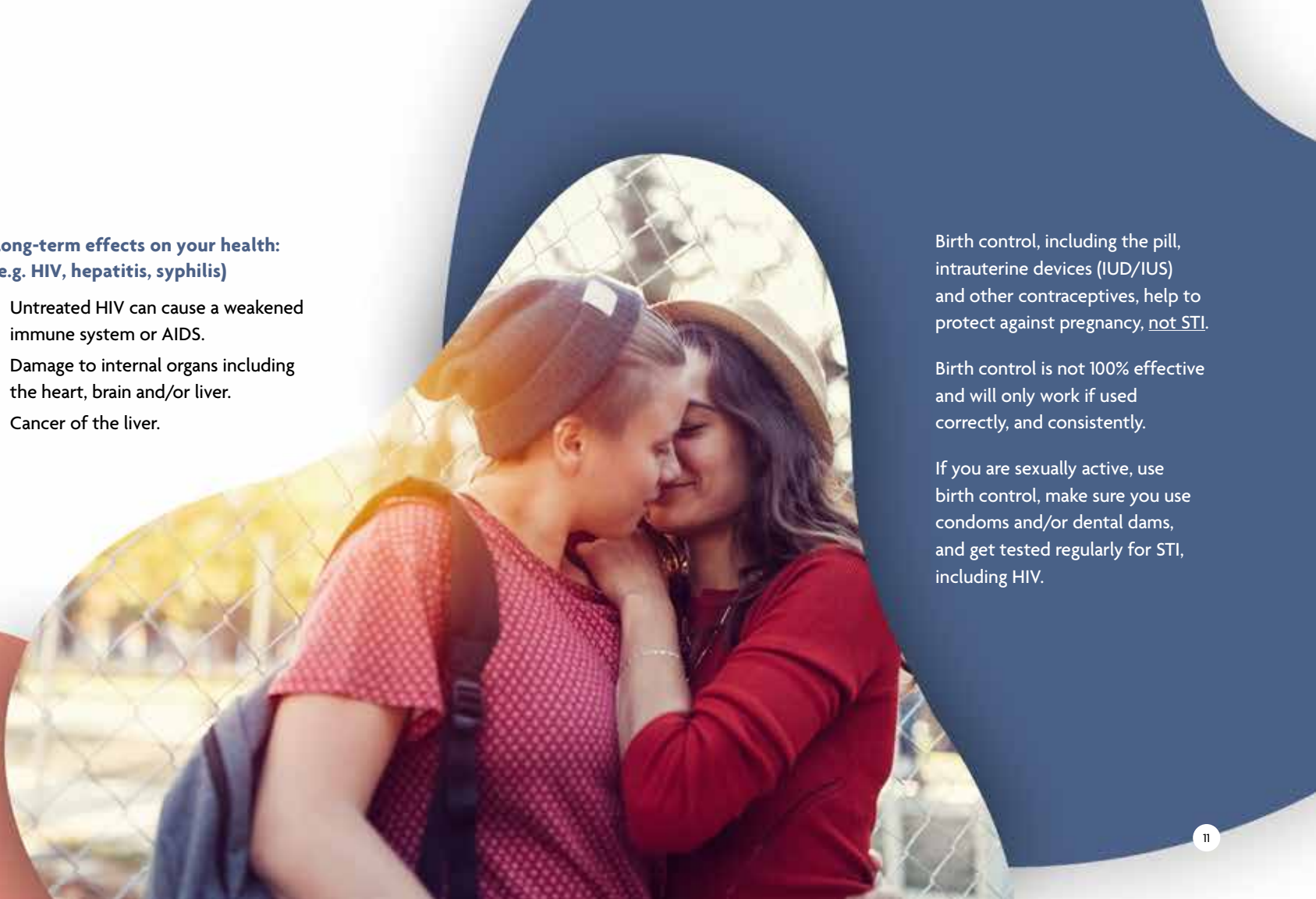
**Long-term effects on your health: (e.g. HIV, hepatitis, syphilis)**

- Untreated HIV can cause a weakened immune system or AIDS.
- Damage to internal organs including the heart, brain and/or liver.
- Cancer of the liver.

Birth control, including the pill, intrauterine devices (IUD/IUS) and other contraceptives, help to protect against pregnancy, not STI.

Birth control is not 100% effective and will only work if used correctly, and consistently.

If you are sexually active, use birth control, make sure you use condoms and/or dental dams, and get tested regularly for STI, including HIV.



Reduce  
your risk



## Can I get an STI without intercourse if we are just fooling around?

Yes, you can get some STI just by intimate skin to skin touching or kissing of an infected area.

All kinds of sex including oral, vaginal and anal intercourse can transmit infections. They are also contracted through body fluids like blood, semen, saliva, vaginal secretions and breast milk.

It doesn't matter whether you are heterosexual, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit or questioning. STI can be transmitted by anyone.

Drugs and/or alcohol can impair judgement and lead to risky behaviour. When you or your partner are impaired and 'caught up in the moment', you may be more likely to have sex without a condom and take other risks that can increase your exposure to STI and unplanned pregnancy.



*Most STI have no obvious symptoms (or only mild ones), so you may not know if you or your sexual partner has an infection. That's why practising safer sex—always using condoms—and getting tested regularly is so important.*



**You can choose  
not to have sex.**

**You might not be ready  
to have sex if:**

- You aren't sure about it.
- You feel pressured, scared or uncomfortable.
- You need to get drunk or high to do it.
- Your partner is not ready.
- You can't talk to your partner about safer sex, birth control or STI.
- You or your partner could get pregnant but don't want a baby and don't use birth control.
- You don't have condoms or dental dams to protect yourself and your partner.



**STI rates are  
the highest**

among Canadians 25 years or younger. If you choose to have sex, remember to always use condoms and/or dental dams.

## What is consent and what is sexual assault?

Consent is when you and your partner feel informed and freely agree to participate in any sexual activity. Your body is yours alone and only you can give your consent.

If one of you is drunk, on drugs, or feels forced, consent has not actually been given. And even if you originally said “yes”; **you can still change your mind**. Saying “no” at any time still means “no.” Any type of sexual activity without your consent or your partner’s consent is sexual assault.

### You may feel pressured to have sex.

Pressure to engage in sexual activity can come from many sources including someone you know well, such as a classmate, friend or partner, someone who has been bullying you (online or in person), or someone you have chatted with or ‘met’ on a dating site or hook-up app.

Sexting is considered a risky sexual activity, even though it isn’t physical, and will not cause an STI. Sexting usually involves sending sexually explicit pictures and/or texts online. Once those images or words are sent, you have no control over whether or not they will be shared with other people.

Visit [sexandu.ca/consent](https://sexandu.ca/consent) for more information on consent, sexual assault and online safety.

If you think you have been sexually assaulted it’s not your fault – don’t hesitate to seek help. Visit [casac.ca/content/anti-violence-centres](https://casac.ca/content/anti-violence-centres) to find a sexual assault crisis centre near you.

## What should I think about and do before I have sex?

- Talk about safer sex and STI testing with your partner.
- If you or your partner could get pregnant but aren't ready to be parents:
  - Talk about contraception with your partner.
  - Use a tool like [ItsaPlan.ca](https://www.itsaPlan.ca) to find out the best contraception for you and make an appointment with your healthcare provider.
- Recognize that you shouldn't be judged for your decision to practise safer sex or for asking your partner to do the same.
- Check to see whether you have been vaccinated against HPV. If not, make an appointment with your healthcare provider to discuss vaccination.
- All provinces and territories in Canada give the hepatitis B vaccine to children. If you did not get the vaccine as a child or are unsure, talk to your healthcare provider.



Hepatitis B  
and HPV can be  
**prevented by  
a vaccine.**



## Condoms and Dental Dams

Most STI can be prevented by using a condom or dental dam during vaginal, anal or oral sex. You can buy condoms or dental dams at drug stores or health clinics without a prescription. The use of pre-lubricated condoms or added personal lubricants can help prevent the risk of a condom breaking.

Other things to think about:

- Check the expiry date on a condom before using one and make sure the packaging and the condom itself don't have any holes or tears.
- Never use a condom more than once, and don't use two condoms at the same time as that can cause breakage.
- It is recommended to use lubricants with condoms, but be sure to use the right type. Vaseline and other oil-based lubricants destroy latex.

## How to use an external (“male”) condom

External condoms are also known as “male” condoms because they cover the penis during sex. There are three kinds of external condoms: natural, latex and synthetic. Natural condoms help prevent pregnancy but do not protect against STI. To protect against STI, make sure to use a latex or synthetic condom.

### 1 Open Carefully

Do not use teeth, scissors or a knife to open the condom. Roughly tearing or handling the condom can damage it. If the person handling the condom has long fingernails, be extra careful as they can nick the condom, making it ineffective, putting you at risk of STI or unplanned pregnancy.

### 2 Place & Pinch

Put the condom at the tip of the erect penis and pinch out the air at the top. You can also put condoms on sex toys to make sure they won't transmit STI. If the sex toy is inserted in different partners or openings, the condom should be changed.

### 3 Roll It On

Unroll the condom right down to the base of the erect penis or sex toy.

### Afterwards

- 4 The condom user should pull out right after ejaculation and while the penis is still hard. Remember to hold the base of the condom when pulling out so that it does not come off. Throw the used condom in the garbage and do not reuse it.

### Lubricants

It is recommended to use lubricated condoms and, if needed, add a personal lubricant to the outside of the condom to decrease the risk of breaking and to decrease discomfort.

Broken condoms can put you at risk of STI or pregnancy. Only water-based lubricants should be used with latex condoms. Synthetic condoms are fine to use with oil or water-based lubricants.

## How to use an internal (“female”) condom

Internal condoms are also known as “female” condoms because they are inserted in an opening such as the vagina. These condoms are larger than “male” condoms and are pre-lubricated. When used properly, they are highly effective at preventing pregnancy and reducing the risk of STI. They are primarily used for vaginal sex, but they can also be used for anal sex. It is not recommended to use a “male” condom and a “female” condom at the same time as it increases the risk of a condom breaking.

### 1 Open Carefully

Do not use teeth, scissors or a knife to open the condom. Roughly tearing or handling the condom can damage it. If the person handling the condom has long fingernails, be extra careful as they can nick the condom, making it ineffective, putting you at risk of STI or unplanned pregnancy.

### 2 Placement

The outer ring covers the area around the opening of the vagina or anus. The inner ring is used for insertion and to help hold the condom in place during intercourse.

Hold the condom at the closed end, squat, sit or lie comfortably and then slide the inner ring inside. Gently push the inner ring up as far as it will go with the outer ring remaining on the outside. Guide the penis or sex toy to make sure it is entering inside the condom, not next to it.

### 3 Afterwards

To remove the condom, twist the outer ring gently and pull the condom out. Throw the used condom in the garbage and do not reuse it.

### Lubricants

“Female” condoms usually come pre-lubricated or with a small package of lubricant. If you need additional lubricant make sure you know what kind of condom you are using first.

For polyurethane condoms, oil-based lubricant products can be used. For latex condoms, use a lubricant made of water, glycol or silicone. The use of the proper lubricant will help avoid breakage and discomfort.

## How to use a dental dam

Dental dams are latex or polyurethane sheets that are used as a barrier between the mouth and vagina, penis, or anus during oral sex. They are rectangles of about 10 inches by 6 inches and are available online and at some health clinics, specialty sex shops and drug stores without a prescription. You can also easily make a homemade dental dam.

### 1 Open Carefully

Unfold the dam and check for holes or damage that could make it less effective.

### 2 Placement of the Dental Dam

Put the dam flat across the vaginal or anal area before any oral contact. One partner needs to hold it in place.

### 3 Afterwards

Fold the dam up and throw it in the garbage and do not reuse it.

### Lubricants

A water-based personal lubricant may be used directly on vaginal or anal areas before putting the dam in place and can help hold the dam in place.



### DIY

You can make a dental dam from an unlubricated condom by rolling it out, cutting off the top and the ring, and then cutting along the length to create a rectangle.

# STI Symptoms and Treatments





# Syphilis

## What is it?


Syphilis is a bacterial infection that is on the rise in Canada. If undetected, during the first two years of infection, you can pass on syphilis, even if you do not have any symptoms. After these two years, you will still have the infection, but you cannot pass it on. If syphilis is left untreated, it can cause serious health problems including damage to the brain, heart and other organs in the body, which can become permanent.

## How do you get it?

Syphilis is spread by having condomless vaginal, anal and/or oral sex with someone who has the infection. Syphilis can be passed on to a baby during pregnancy or childbirth. Syphilis in babies can cause serious health problems or death. If you are pregnant, it is important to get tested and treated.

## The number of people with syphilis is increasing.

While it is more common among men, syphilis is increasingly affecting women.



Syphilis will not go away on its own if left untreated.

## How can you tell if you have it?

### Symptoms may include:

- An open sore that does not hurt, called a chancre, on the genitals, anus or throat. The sore will go away even if it is not treated, but you will still have syphilis.
- Some chancres might not be apparent since they are painless. A chancre in the vagina might go unnoticed.
- A body rash and/or feeling like you have the flu. These symptoms will also go away even if they are not treated.
- Swollen glands (lymph nodes) including behind the ears, under the jaw, in the armpits and in the groin. The swelling may feel like small bumps underneath the skin.

### IF YOU HAVE SYPHILIS

You should notify your sexual partner(s) so that they can be tested and treated, if needed, and avoid exposing others. If you are uncomfortable notifying your partner(s), ask your healthcare provider or local public health unit for assistance.



## How do you get tested?

You get tested for syphilis with a blood test. You may also have a swab taken of your sore(s). Having a chancre can also increase your risk of getting or passing on HIV.

It is possible to have more than one infection at the same time. If you are tested for syphilis, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done. Make sure to also ask about being tested for HIV, because it may not be part of routine STI testing.

## How is it treated?

Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics. Once you have been treated for syphilis, you will need to go for follow-up blood tests to make sure the infection is gone. It is important that you attend all of the scheduled visits.

# Gonorrhea

## What is it?

Gonorrhea is a bacterial infection that often occurs at the same time as chlamydia. Gonorrhea is on the rise in Canada and around the world and is becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics.

That means that one day current antibiotics may not work to treat this infection.

If left untreated, gonorrhea can cause serious health problems including infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, chronic pelvic pain, an increased risk of ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy that occurs outside the uterus), and pain in the testicles.

## How do you get it?

You can get gonorrhea if you have condomless oral, vaginal and/or anal sex with someone who has an infection. If you are pregnant, it is important to get tested and treated for gonorrhea to avoid passing the infection on to the baby during childbirth.

## How can you tell if you have it?

You can pass on gonorrhea to someone without even knowing that you have it, as you may not have any symptoms.

## If you have gonorrhea and you do have symptoms, you might notice:

### FOR PEOPLE WITH VAGINAS:

- A change or an increase in discharge from the vagina
- Bleeding between periods
- Pain or bleeding during or after vaginal sex
- Pain in the lower abdomen
- Burning sensation while urinating

### FOR PEOPLE WITH PENISES:

- Burning sensation while urinating
- Discharge from the penis
- Burning or itching around the opening of the penis
- Pain in the testicles

Condoms can help prevent the spread of gonorrhea during anal or vaginal sex, and condoms or dental dams can be used for protection during oral sex.



## How do you get tested?

You get tested for gonorrhea with a urine sample. You may also have a swab taken from the throat, cervix, anus or penis. If you are tested for gonorrhea, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done. It is possible to have more than one STI at the same time. Make sure to also ask about being tested for HIV, because it may not be part of routine STI testing.

The number of people with gonorrhea has

**doubled in the past 10 years**

with over 75 new cases reported in Canada every day.

## How is it treated?

It is becoming more and more difficult to treat gonorrhea with existing antibiotics. It is important that you take your medication as prescribed even if you start to feel better. If you have finished your treatment for gonorrhea and still have symptoms, you should go back to your healthcare provider as soon as possible because you may need additional treatment.

Many people who have gonorrhea also have chlamydia and are treated for both infections at the same time.

## IF YOU HAVE GONORRHEA

You should notify your sexual partner(s) so that they can be tested and treated, if needed, and avoid exposing others. If you are uncomfortable notifying your partner(s), ask your healthcare provider or local public health unit for assistance.



# Chlamydia

## What is it?

Chlamydia is a bacterial STI that is very common, especially in people aged 15–24. Most people who have chlamydia do not have any signs or symptoms. But if it is left untreated, chlamydia can cause serious health problems including infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, chronic pelvic pain, and can increase the risk of ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy that occurs outside the uterus).

## How do you get it?

You can get chlamydia if you have condomless oral, vaginal and/or anal sex with someone who has the infection. If you are pregnant, it is important to get tested and treated for chlamydia to avoid passing the infection on to the baby during childbirth.

*Certain STI such as chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis often have no symptoms at all. If you're getting tested for one, you should get tested for others. Make sure to also ask about being tested for HIV, because it may not be part of routine STI testing.*

## How can you tell if you have it?

You may not know that you have chlamydia, since most people do not have symptoms.

## If you have chlamydia and you do have symptoms, you might notice:

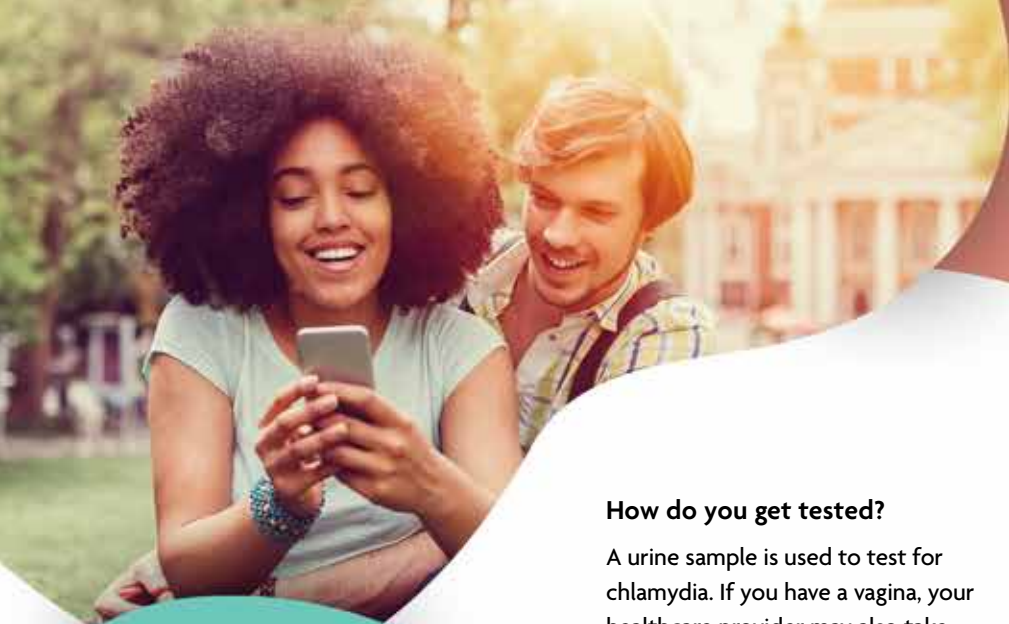
### FOR PEOPLE WITH VAGINAS:

- A change or an increase in discharge from the vagina
- Vaginal itching
- Bleeding between periods
- Pain or bleeding during or after vaginal sex
- Pain in the lower abdomen
- Burning sensation while urinating

### FOR PEOPLE WITH PENISES:

- Burning sensation while urinating
- Discharge from the penis
- Burning or itching around the opening of the penis
- Pain in the testicles





There are over  
**340 cases**  
**of chlamydia**  
reported in Canada  
every day.

### How do you get tested?

A urine sample is used to test for chlamydia. If you have a vagina, your healthcare provider may also take samples from your cervix (the opening to the uterus) using a swab. Swabs may also be taken from the throat, anus, or penis. If you are tested for chlamydia, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done. Make sure to also ask about being tested for HIV, because it may not be part of routine STI testing.

### How is it treated?

Chlamydia can be cured with antibiotics. If you are prescribed antibiotics it is important that you take your medication as prescribed, even after you start to feel better. Even if you are treated for this infection, you can get it again if you have sex with someone who has the infection and has not been treated or has not finished treatment.

A different type of chlamydia can also cause a less common form of STI called lymphogranuloma venereum, also known as LGV or venereal disease. See page 44 for more information.

### IF YOU HAVE CHLAMYDIA

You should notify your sexual partner(s) so that they can be tested and treated, if needed, and avoid exposing others. The test and treatment are simple and can cure the infection. If you are uncomfortable notifying your partner(s), ask your healthcare provider or local public health unit for assistance.

# Lymphogranuloma Venereum

## What is it?

Lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV) is an STI caused by a certain type of chlamydia bacteria. LGV can infect the:

- Vagina
- Penis
- Cervix (the opening to the uterus)
- Anus
- Mouth

LGV is relatively rare in Canada but cases have been reported, particularly among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men. Left untreated, LGV can cause serious health problems such as scarring and deformity to the genitals and rectum (the lower part of the large intestine) that may need surgery. LGV must be treated.

## How do you get it?

You can get LGV if you have condomless oral, vaginal and/or anal sex with a person who has the infection.

## How can you tell if you have it?

### There are usually three stages of LGV infection:

- 1 A painless sore or lump may appear where the bacteria entered your body. The sore may go away without treatment, but the infection is still there and needs to be treated. Having a sore can increase the risk of getting or passing on other infections such as HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C.
- 2 In the second stage you may develop swelling of the glands (lymph nodes), flu-like symptoms, discharge from the genital or anal area, and/or rectal pain and bleeding.
- 3 If left untreated, at this stage the symptoms can become more severe. You may be able to feel swollen glands behind the ears, under the jaw, in the armpits and in the groin. You may also experience swelling of the genitals or the rectum.



### How do you get tested?

LGV is tested by taking samples from the sores using a swab or by doing a urine test. If your glands are swollen, your healthcare provider may also take a sample of liquid from your glands. If you are tested for LGV have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done.

### How is it treated?

LGV can be cured with antibiotics. It is important that you take all of your medication as directed by your healthcare provider, even if you start to feel better.

*Proper use of condoms and/or dental dams on a consistent basis can prevent LGV.*

### IF YOU HAVE LGV

You should notify your sexual partner(s) so that they can be tested and treated, if needed, and avoid exposing others. If you are uncomfortable notifying your partner, ask your healthcare provider or local public health unit for assistance.





## Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

### What is it?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. HIV may lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) if it is left untreated.

Approximately  
**seven  
Canadians**  
are newly diagnosed  
with HIV in Canada  
every day.

### How do you get it?

HIV is spread by having condomless vaginal, anal and/or oral sex with someone who has the infection, by coming in contact with infected blood or blood products, and by sharing needles or other drug equipment (syringes, cookers, water, filters, etc.) with someone who has HIV.

If you are pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant, get tested for HIV. If you are HIV positive, with proper treatment and care before and during pregnancy, you can have a healthy baby. In Canada, formula feeding is recommended to mothers who have HIV to prevent transmission to the baby.

HIV cannot be passed on through hugging, kissing or casual contact like shaking hands or giving someone a high-five or pat on the back.

If you are HIV-positive and being treated with antiretroviral medication that suppresses the virus to undetectable levels, there is effectively no risk of transmitting HIV sexually to your partner(s).



There are situations where taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) can help to prevent you from getting HIV. Your healthcare provider can help you decide whether PrEP is appropriate for you. PrEP does not protect against other STI so be sure to use condoms to prevent transmission of other STI.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV through contact with blood, breast milk, vaginal or anal secretions, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) can reduce the risk of contracting HIV. PEP needs to be started within 72 hours of exposure for maximum effect and requires consultation with a healthcare provider.

Because HIV weakens the immune system, it can be easier for someone with HIV to contract other STI as well. Having an STI that causes sores, such as herpes or syphilis, increases the risk of getting HIV or passing HIV to a partner.

If you have HIV, the best way to protect yourself and your partner is to take your medication to achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load and to use condoms consistently for protection against other STI.



### **How can you tell if you have it?**

Some people present no symptoms for many years, whereas other people may develop mild flu-like symptoms two to four weeks after contracting HIV.

### **Common early symptoms can include:**

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Muscle aches and joint pain
- Swollen glands (lymph nodes)

*Proper use of condoms and/or dental dams on a consistent basis can prevent HIV. You can also use PrEP to prevent the transmission of HIV if you are more likely to be exposed to HIV.*

## How do you get tested?

HIV is diagnosed using a blood test. HIV will show up in a blood test approximately three to four weeks after you have contracted the infection, so it is important to be retested if the window between testing and exposure to HIV is really short.

However, if you know you have been exposed to HIV, you can seek medical attention prior to a blood test. A health care professional may recommend you start post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) medication immediately.

If you are tested for HIV, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done. It is possible to have more than one infection at the same time. This requires specialized treatment and care.

It is important that you follow up for your test results and any treatment you might need.



## How is it treated?

There is no cure for HIV, but it can be managed with antiretroviral medications and medical supervision.

Antiretroviral medications help lower the amount of virus in your body, keep your immune system healthy, and, in this way, help you fight off other infections.

If you are HIV-positive, you can live a longer and healthier life if you start treatment early. You can also prevent sexual transmission of HIV to your partner if you are on treatment and have an undetectable viral load.

## IF YOU ARE DIAGNOSED WITH HIV

You must notify your sexual partner(s) so that they can be tested and treated. If you are uncomfortable notifying your partner(s), ask your healthcare provider or local public health unit for assistance. Resources are available at [CATIE.ca](http://CATIE.ca) if you have questions about your obligations to disclose your status.

## Hepatitis B

### What is it?

Hepatitis B is a virus that can infect the liver and sometimes leads to severe liver damage or cancer of the liver.


### How do you get it?

Hepatitis B is spread by having condomless vaginal, anal and/or oral sex with a person who has the infection. It can also be spread through sharing contaminated drug-use equipment (e.g.: needles, straws, pipes, cookers, etc.) to inject or snort drugs; tattooing, body piercing or acupuncture when unsterile equipment is used; unsterilized medical

equipment; and, through blood or cutting rituals. While less common, it can also be spread by sharing personal care items like a razor, nail clippers or a toothbrush with a person who has the infection.

### Prevention

You can protect yourself against hepatitis B by getting the hepatitis B vaccine. If you did not receive the vaccine as a child or are unsure, you can still get it as an adult. If you have hepatitis B, your sexual partner(s) should be vaccinated.



*If you are pregnant, you can pass hepatitis B to the baby during childbirth, so it is important to get tested. Let your healthcare provider know if you have hepatitis B.*

## How can you tell if you have it?

You may not have any signs or symptoms, so you can pass the virus on without knowing that you have it.

### If you do have symptoms, they may include:

- Tiredness
- Pain in the abdomen
- Dark urine and/or pale stools
- Lack of appetite
- Nausea
- Yellowing of the skin and/or the whites of the eyes (jaundice)

## How do you get tested?

You get tested for hepatitis B using a blood test. If you are tested for hepatitis B, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done. It is possible to have more than one infection at the same time. This requires specialized treatment and care.

### IF YOU HAVE HEPATITIS B

You should notify your sexual partner(s) and household members so that they can get vaccinated to protect themselves. If you are uncomfortable notifying your partner(s), ask your healthcare provider or local public health unit for assistance.

## How is it treated?

In most people, the virus will go away on its own within six months, but it can be passed on to others during this time. Once the body fights off the infection, you are protected from ever getting the virus again and cannot pass it on to others.

If you think you have been exposed to hepatitis B your healthcare provider may inject you with an antibody (immune globulin) within 12 hours of exposure to the virus. For longer-term protection, you should get the hepatitis B vaccine at the same time.

There are some cases where other treatments like antivirals may be recommended.

Some people will not respond to treatment and will have hepatitis B for life. As long as they have the virus they can pass it onto others.



# Hepatitis C

## What is it?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). Hepatitis C can lead to severe liver damage and cancer of the liver. There is no vaccine to prevent it.

## How do you get it?

Hepatitis C is spread through contact with infected blood. It is most often spread through sharing contaminated drug-use equipment (e.g.: needles, straws, pipes, cookers, etc.) to inject or snort drugs; tattooing, body piercing or acupuncture when unsterile equipment is used; unsterilized medical equipment; and, through blood or cutting rituals. It can also be spread by sharing personal care items like a razor, nail clippers or a toothbrush with a person who has the infection.

Sexual transmission of hepatitis C is less common, but it can be transmitted sexually, especially when there is a chance that infected blood is present (such as during menstruation).

## How can you tell if you have it?

The majority of people will not develop symptoms and will not know they have the virus. If symptoms do develop it can take two to six months for them to appear. People can pass the virus on without even knowing that they have it.

### **If you do have symptoms, they may include:**

- Tiredness
- Pain in the abdomen
- Dark urine and/or pale stools
- Lack of appetite
- Nausea
- Yellowing of the skin and/or the whites of the eyes (jaundice)

*Hepatitis C can be passed on to the baby during pregnancy or childbirth, so it is important to tell your healthcare provider if you have hepatitis C or ask if you should be tested.*

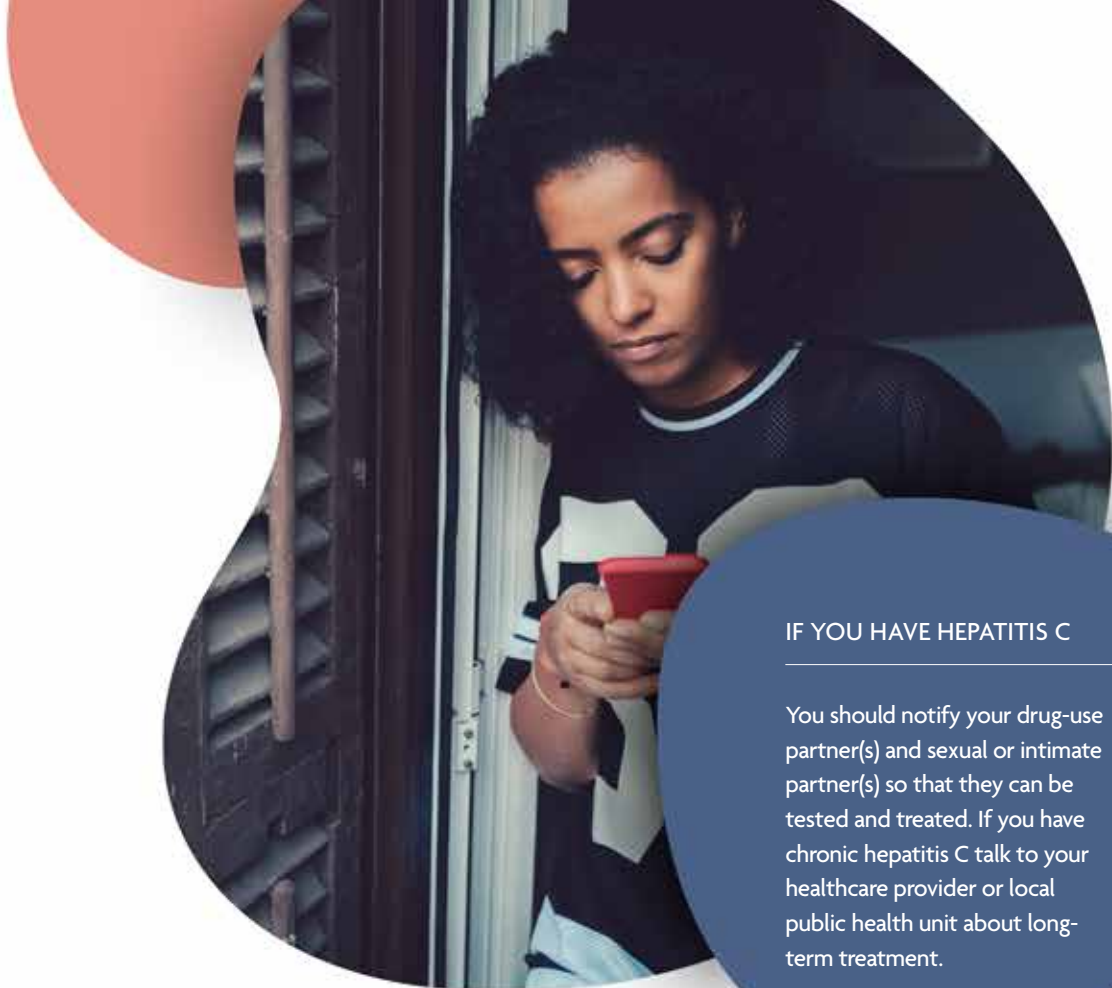
### How do you get tested?

A blood test can tell if you have hepatitis C. If you are tested for hepatitis C, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done. It is possible to have more than one blood-borne infection at the same time. This requires specialized treatment and care.

### How is it treated?

Some adults with hepatitis C will clear the virus on their own within six months. There are several drug combinations that have been approved by Health Canada to treat hepatitis C and to prevent progression of liver disease caused by hepatitis C.

Even if you clear the virus on your own or with treatment, you can still contract it again. Many people with hepatitis C develop a long-term infection called chronic hepatitis C, which can lead to severe liver damage and liver cancer. Chronic hepatitis C is also treatable and in some cases can be cured.



### IF YOU HAVE HEPATITIS C

You should notify your drug-use partner(s) and sexual or intimate partner(s) so that they can be tested and treated. If you have chronic hepatitis C talk to your healthcare provider or local public health unit about long-term treatment.

## Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

### What is it?

HPV is short for Human papillomavirus. There are about 200 types of HPV that can infect different parts of the body.

Some types of HPV can:

- Cause warts on the penis, scrotum and thighs.
- Cause warts on the inside or outside the vagina, anus or throat.
- Cause cell changes that can lead to cervical, oral or anal cancers.

You can have more than one type of HPV at a time.

### How do you get it?

You can get HPV if you have condomless oral, vaginal and/or anal sex with a person who has the virus. You can also get HPV from other sexual activity involving intimate skin-to-skin contact. You or your partner(s) can still spread the virus even if you do not have any symptoms.

### Vaccination is up to 90% effective

at preventing the HPV types responsible for most genital warts and HPV-related cancers.

### How can you tell if you have it?

Most people do not have symptoms. This is why it is so hard to detect. Depending on the type of HPV you have, you may get warts on your genitals or anus which may look like bumps that can be cauliflower-like or may look like flat white patches. Some warts are very hard to see so you may feel them before you see them. Sometimes HPV doesn't cause visible warts, but rather abnormalities on Pap tests. Pap tests involve collecting cells from the cervix during an appointment with a healthcare provider, and examining them under a microscope to make sure the cells are healthy.





## HPV Vaccine

Youth aged 9–26 should get their HPV vaccine, but it might also be appropriate for adults older than 26 years of age. Ideally, you should get the vaccine before becoming sexually active and exposed to HPV.

If you are sexually active, you can still benefit from HPV vaccination. Few sexually active people have contracted all types of HPV that are prevented by the vaccine, so you will still get protection by getting the vaccine.

The vaccine is not recommended during pregnancy.

Vaccine schedules can vary across provinces and territories. For information on how to get the vaccine where you live, speak to your healthcare provider or local public health unit.

*Everyone should make sure they have been vaccinated against HPV if they are, or are planning to be, sexually active.*

## How do you get tested?

A healthcare provider can usually tell if you have oral or genital warts by doing a visual exam. Regular cervical cancer screening (Pap/HPV test) is important for all people with a cervix who are, or have ever been, sexually active. The cervix is located in the lower, narrow end of the uterus at the end of the vagina. The screening tests can detect abnormal cell changes in the cervix that may cause cancer.

Pap test screening usually begins at age 21 and is repeated periodically after that. There is currently no test to detect high-risk HPV in people with penises.

If you are tested for HPV, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done. The need for additional testing depends on risk factors and should be assessed by a healthcare provider.

## HPV can cause cancer

of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus, mouth and throat.

### How is it treated?

HPV cannot be cured, but oral or genital warts caused by HPV will often go away without treatment. Your healthcare provider can advise you on how to treat them if they do not go away on their own. Some ways that oral or genital warts can be removed include:

- Freezing the warts with a very cold liquid called liquid nitrogen.
- Applying an ointment or liquid to destroy the warts.
- In some cases a surgical procedure may be required.

Treatment does not prevent re-infection or recurrence of HPV. You can still get another HPV infection in the future.



*HPV vaccination is the best way to prevent genital warts and cervical cancer. Condoms will reduce the risk of transmission but are not 100% effective, because HPV can live in areas not covered by condoms.*

## Genital Herpes

### What is it?

Genital herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). The HSV type 1 causes sores around the mouth called “cold sores” and it can also cause sores on the genitals. HSV type 2 usually causes genital herpes.

**500 million people worldwide**

are estimated to have the herpes simplex virus genital infection.

### How do you get it?

Genital herpes is generally passed on through condomless oral, vaginal and/or anal sex with a partner who has the infection, whether the person has sores or not.

You can spread herpes to other parts of your or your partner’s body by touching the sores or fluids from the sores and then touching elsewhere, for example, your eyes, mouth or genitals.

### How can you tell if you have it?

Many people who have herpes will not have symptoms and may not know they have it. When you first have an outbreak of herpes, there may be itchiness along with very painful sores and blisters. The sores usually go away on their own, but you will still have the virus. An outbreak may also include painful swollen glands in the groin and flu-like symptoms. These symptoms may last several weeks.

*If you are pregnant, you can pass the virus on to your baby during pregnancy or childbirth. Tell your healthcare provider if you have herpes. They can give you medications to reduce the risk of your baby getting herpes.*



### Can it keep coming back?

Herpes can keep coming back. These are called recurrences. There is no way to predict if or how often recurrences will happen. Your healthcare provider can give you information on how to manage the infection, including treatment to control recurrences. Some common causes of recurrences include:

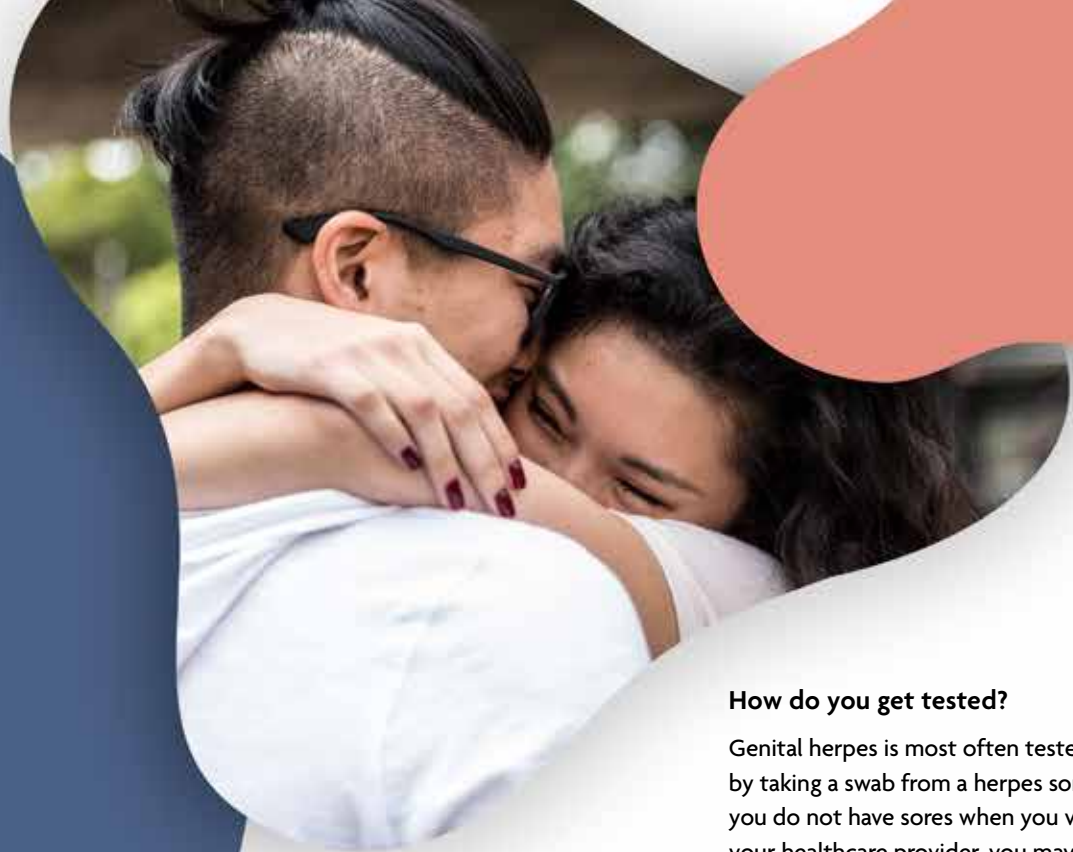
- Fatigue and stress
- Existing illness
- Overexposure to sun
- Your period
- Pregnancy

### How can you prevent passing on the virus?

- If you feel a burning or tingling sensation but have no sores, do not have sex. This is a sign that you may be developing an outbreak and even without the sores, you can pass on the virus.
- You should avoid oral sex when you have a cold sore.
- You should not have sex if you have an outbreak of genital herpes. Wait until several days after the sores are completely healed.
- Proper and consistent use of condoms and/or dental dams can lower your risk of passing on or getting the virus because herpes can be passed even when there aren't any symptoms.

### How do you get tested?

Genital herpes is most often tested by taking a swab from a herpes sore. If you do not have sores when you visit your healthcare provider, you may have to delay testing. If you are tested for genital herpes, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done.



### What can you do if you have a genital herpes outbreak?

- Keep the area clean and dry.
- Avoid using ointments and creams, which can cause the infection to spread.
- Wear cotton underwear.
- Wear loose fitting clothes.
- After urinating, avoid wiping the area. Pat it dry to avoid spreading the infection.
- If it hurts when you urinate, sit in a tub of warm water or pour warm water over the area while you are urinating.



### How is it treated?

Genital herpes cannot be cured but it can be managed. There are medications that may help to prevent outbreaks or reduce how long the outbreak lasts. Your healthcare provider may also prescribe medication for pain if your outbreaks are severe and cause discomfort.

### How is it prevented?

Since many people with herpes do not have any symptoms, proper use of condoms and/or dental dams on a consistent basis can help prevent herpes, but is not 100% effective as herpes can be present in areas not covered by condoms.

### IF YOU HAVE HERPES

You should notify your sexual partner(s) so that they can practise safer sex with you. If they have contracted the virus, they can be treated, and avoid passing it on to others. If they do not have herpes, they can choose to use condoms and avoid sex during outbreaks, to lessen but not eliminate their chance of contraction. If you are uncomfortable notifying your partner(s), ask your healthcare provider or local public health unit for assistance.

## Pubic Lice and Scabies

### What is it?

Pubic lice are also known as “crabs” because the lice resemble tiny crabs. They are usually found around the genitals in the pubic hair. You can get pubic lice from having close contact with someone who has it. Lice can be clear to darker brown in colour. They live by feeding on human blood and lay their eggs at the base of the pubic hair. Their eggs are called nits and can stay alive for up to 10 days.

Scabies are tiny bugs or mites that burrow below the surface of the skin and lay eggs. They are not visible to the naked eye.

### How do you get it?

Pubic lice and scabies are passed on from one person to another through sexual and non-sexual contact. An example of non-sexual contact is sharing towels or sheets with a person who has pubic lice or scabies. Pubic lice and scabies can live on objects such as clothing, towels, bedding and mattresses for one to two days if they fall off their host.

### How can you tell if you have it?

If you have pubic lice or scabies you will feel itchy and may have a rash. For pubic lice, you might see tiny light brown insects or oval, whitish eggs on the hair. Bites can cause a rash or small bluish spots on your skin. For scabies, itching occurs mainly at night and a rash may appear between your fingers, on your wrists, abdomen, ankles, on the bend of your elbows or around your genitals.





### How do you get tested?

You can usually tell if you have pubic lice by finding the adult lice or eggs on the hair. If you are not sure if you have pubic lice or scabies, see your healthcare provider. If you have scabies or pubic lice you should discuss with your healthcare provider which other STI testing should be done.

The best way to protect against STI is to not have sex. If you are having any type of sex, the best way to protect yourself against STI is to use condoms and/or dental dams consistently and correctly.

### How is it treated?

Pubic lice and scabies are treated with special creams, lotions or shampoos available at the drug store without a prescription. The pharmacist can help you find the right product. You need to follow the directions carefully. Your partners, friends and family may also have lice or scabies and have to be treated too. Infants, those who are pregnant and those who are breastfeeding need a different treatment. Speak to a pharmacist to make sure that you use the safest treatment for you.

Because lice and scabies can live on clothing, towels, bedding and mattresses, you need to:

- Dry clean or machine wash all of your clothing in hot water.
- Wash all bed linen in hot water.
- Store quilts and blankets for one week in sealed airtight plastic bags if you cannot wash them.
- Vacuum everything that has been in contact that you cannot wash (mattress, carpets, etc.).

## Trichomoniasis

### What is it?

Trichomoniasis is caused by a parasite and must be treated. If you are pregnant and have trichomoniasis, your baby may be born early or be underweight at birth. You can also pass the infection on to your baby during childbirth.

### How do you get it?

Trichomoniasis is most often spread by having condomless vaginal sex with someone who has the infection.

**10–50%**  
**of people**  
of people who have  
trichomoniasis  
have no symptoms.

### How can you tell if you have it?

The infection is most commonly found in the vagina and the opening of the penis (urethra), but most people do not have symptoms. You can pass it on without knowing that you have it.

### If you do have symptoms, they may include:

- A change or increase in vaginal discharge
- Vaginal itching
- Pain during vaginal sex
- Burning during urination
- Discharge from the penis
- Burning or itching around the opening of the penis





If left untreated or if treatment is not completed,

## **STI can recur and spread to sexual partners as well.**

### **How do you get tested?**

You get tested for trichomoniasis by taking a swab of discharge from the vagina or from the tip of the penis. Trichomoniasis can also increase the risk of getting and passing on HIV.

It is possible to have more than one infection at the same time. If you are tested for trichomoniasis, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about which other STI testing should be done.

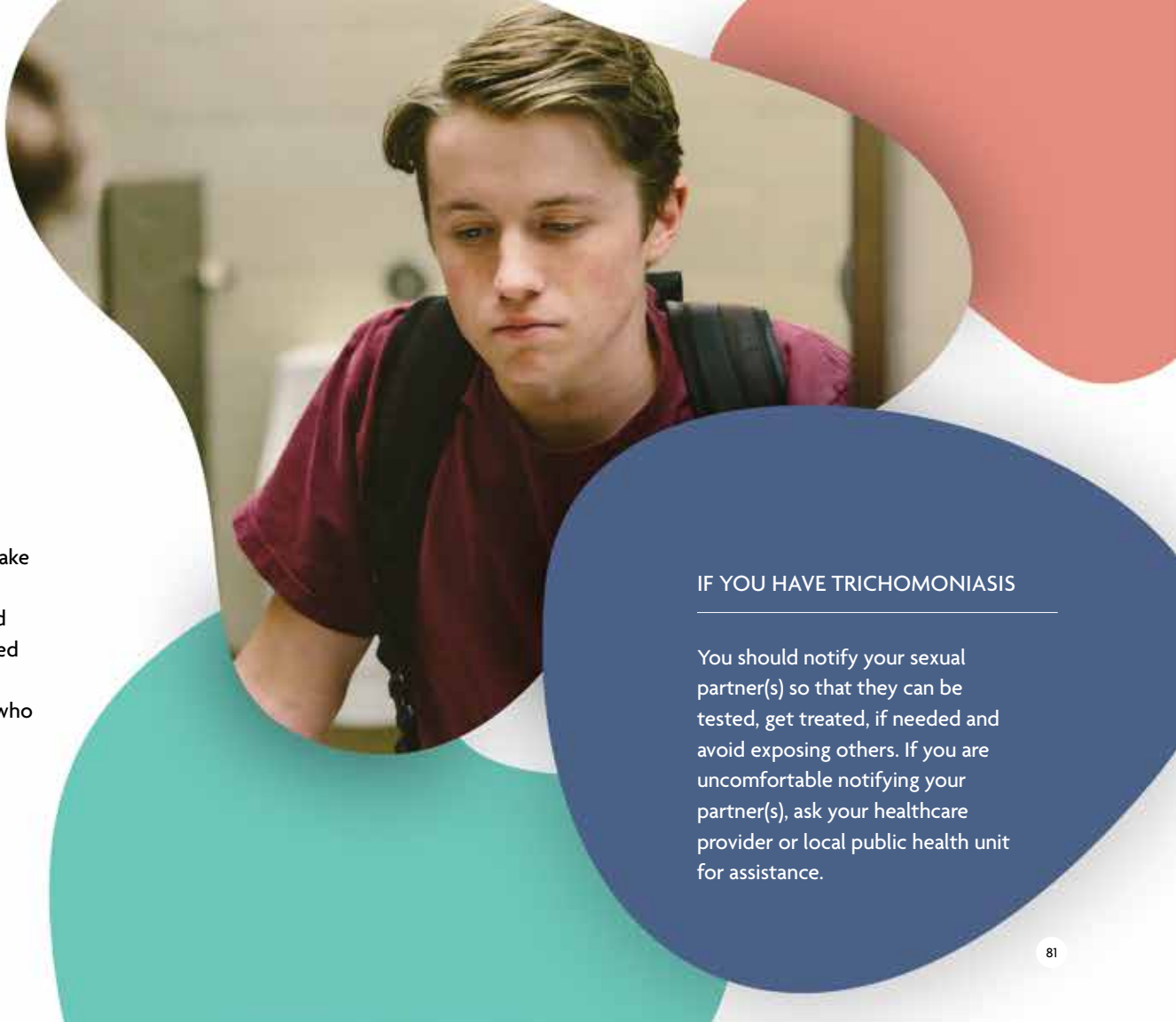
### **How is it treated?**

Trichomoniasis can be cured with antibiotics. It is important that you take your medication as prescribed, even if you start to feel better. You should not have sex until you have completed treatment. You can get the infection again if you have sex with someone who has trichomoniasis and has not been treated.

### **IF YOU HAVE TRICHOMONIASIS**

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You should notify your sexual partner(s) so that they can be tested, get treated, if needed and avoid exposing others. If you are uncomfortable notifying your partner(s), ask your healthcare provider or local public health unit for assistance.



## Other, less common STI

### **Mycoplasma genitalium**

*Mycoplasma genitalium* is a bacterial infection that is passed through sex and genital contact and can be responsible for inflammation of the urethra (the tube that carries urine from your bladder to the outside), inflammation of the cervix, pelvic inflammatory disease and even infertility.

Usually a urine sample or swab is taken to test for mycoplasma genitalium if inflammation is detected. The best current treatment is with antibiotics, but mycoplasma genitalium is developing a resistance to some of these drugs, meaning you might need a combination of antibiotics.

It is important that you take your medication as prescribed even if you start to feel better. If you have finished your treatment for mycoplasma genitalium and still have symptoms, you should go back to your healthcare provider as soon as possible. Re-testing may be necessary to determine whether the infection is gone, or if you need additional or alternate treatment.

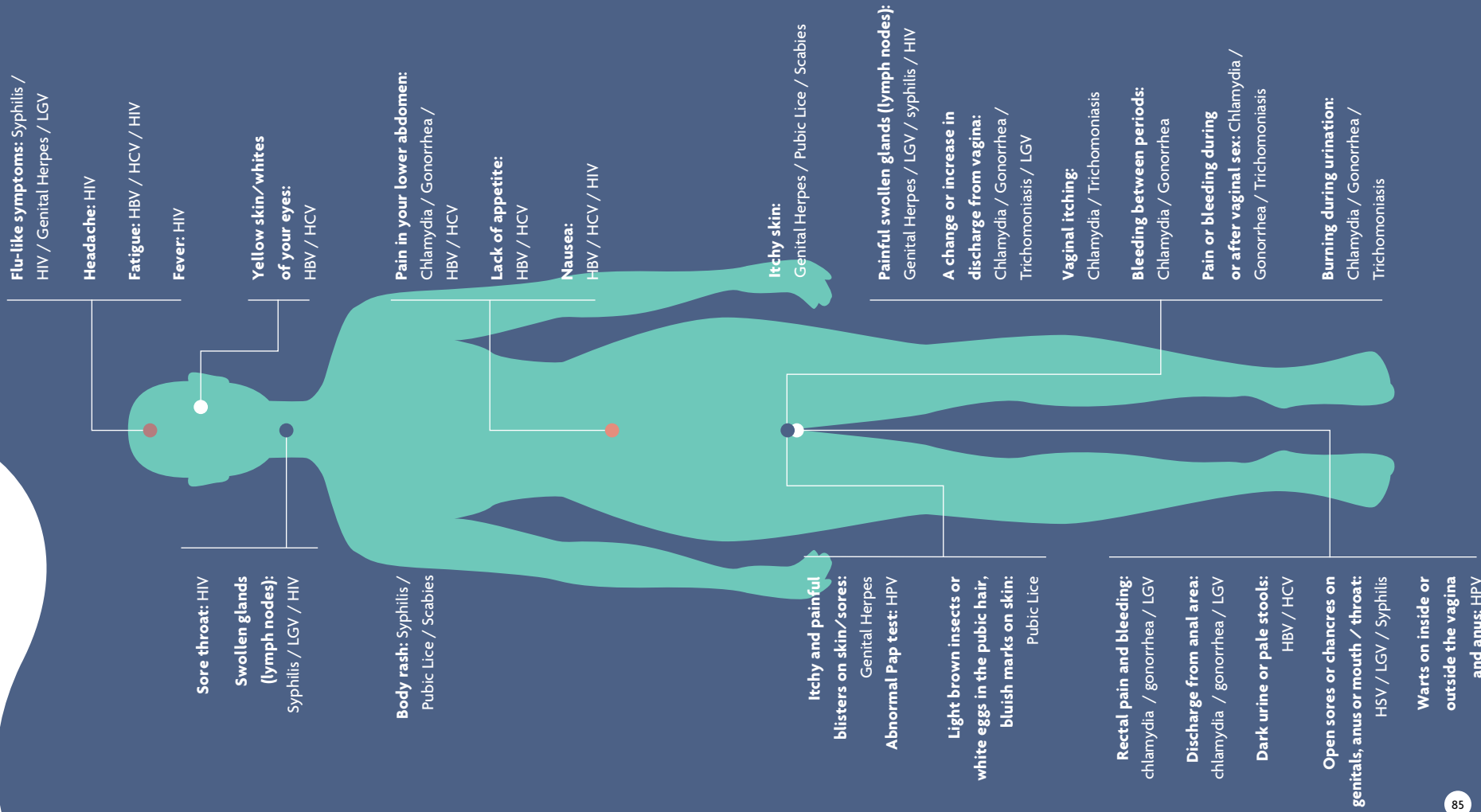
### **Molluscum contagiosum**

*Molluscum contagiosum* is a skin rash that is transmitted during oral, anal and/or vaginal sex, or from towels or clothing from someone who has the infection.

The rash can appear on the genitals, or eyes, nose and mouth, and will often go away without treatment, although it can cause scarring.

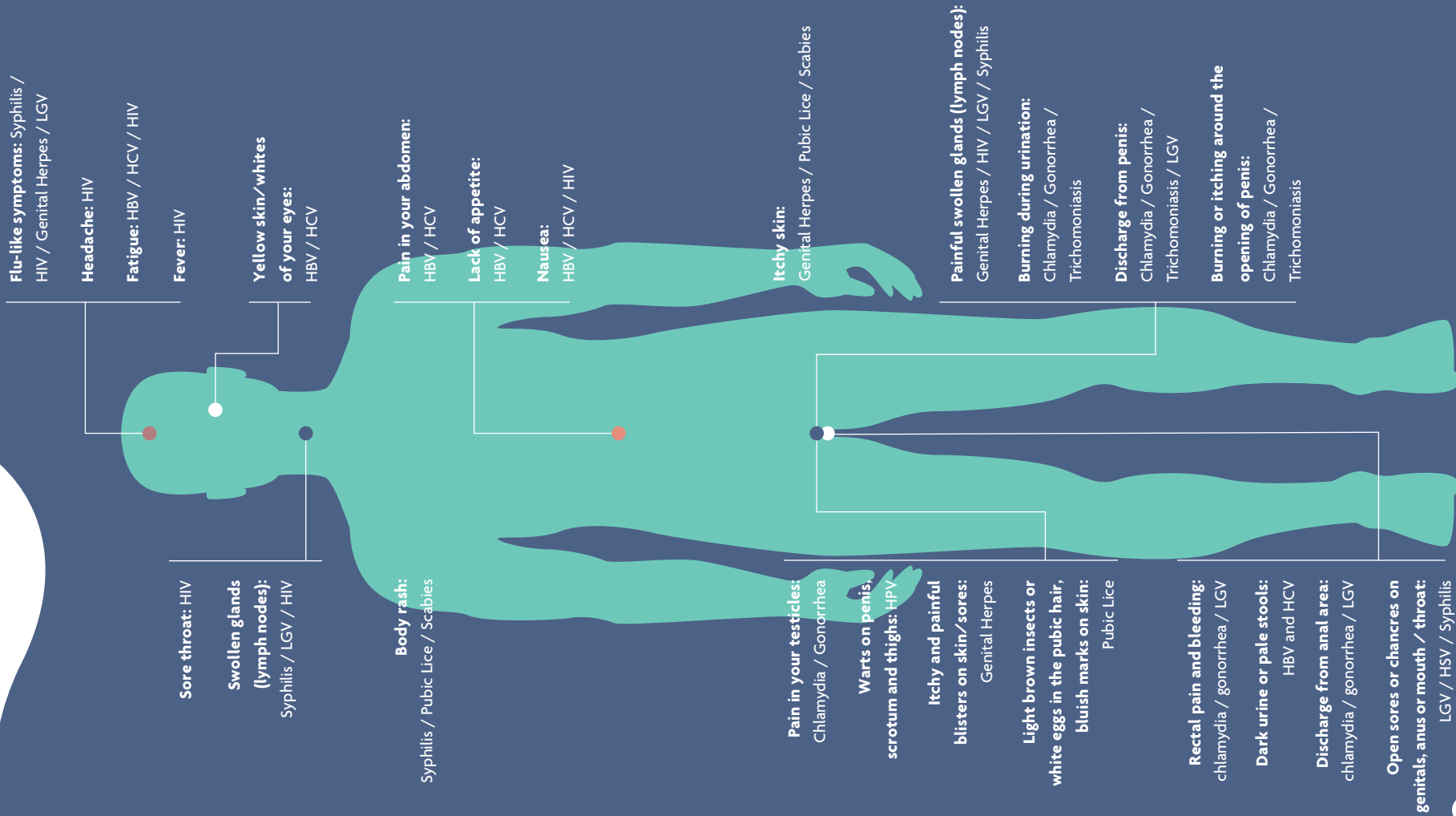
## SYMPTOM MAP for People with Vaginas

It's important to remember that many STI often have no symptoms. Get tested regularly and before each new sexual partner.



## SYMPTOM MAP for People with Penises

It's important to remember that many STI often have no symptoms. Get tested regularly and before each new sexual partner.



Get Tested

## When should I go and get tested?

- If you or your partner have been sexually active with other people, both of you should get tested before you have sex together.
- If your partner is having sex with another partner.
- If you know your current or past partner has or had an STI.
- If the condom breaks or you have sex without one.
- If you or your partner have shared needles for drugs, tattooing or piercing, even once.
- If you or your partner have any STI symptoms.

*If you and your partner both get tested and do not have STI, you are only protected as long as you remain in a relationship with this same partner. When in doubt, talk to your partner about safer sex, testing, and use a condom and/or dental dam.*



## What do I need to know about the testing process?

No matter your sex assigned at birth, gender identity, expression, or sexual orientation, if you feel more comfortable with someone else in the room during your examination, tell your healthcare provider. Everything you discuss with your healthcare provider is confidential.

They cannot discuss things with anyone unless they:

- Have your permission.
- Are making a referral that you have agreed to.
- Are concerned you may not understand medical advice given or the consequences of your decisions.
- Suspect child abuse which they are required to report to a child protection agency.

*Positive test results for chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV are reported to your local public health department. However, your personal information is not given out to the health department or anyone else, and no one will know you have the infection except you, your healthcare provider and public health nurse. A nurse may contact you to offer to help with telling your current and past partners that they need to be tested.*

## What should I expect during my appointment?

The healthcare provider will ask you many questions about your sexual activity. They may ask you to undress from the waist down and will give you a drape to cover yourself. They may do some or all of the following:

- Ask for a urine sample.
- Take a blood sample.
- Use a cotton swab to take samples from the throat, cervix, anus, and/or urethra (the opening of the penis).
- Check the external parts of your genitals including testicles and penis for lumps or pain.

- Use a speculum to look at the inside of the vagina and at the cervix (the opening to the uterus).
- If you are 21 or older, they may do cervical cancer screening, including a Pap test, to check for changes in the cells of the cervix.
- Do a bimanual exam (the healthcare provider places one or two fingers inside the vagina and their other hand on the lower abdomen in order to feel the ovaries and uterus).

## How do I tell my partner(s) I have an STI?

If you have an STI, it is important that your sexual partner(s) be tested as well to make sure the infection does not spread further. There are many ways to tell your partner(s) that they need to get tested for STI.

There are programs and tools to help you tell your partner(s) anonymously that they need to get tested.


Contact your local public health department for more information.





## Quick facts on safer sex

- Educate yourself and know the risks—all kinds of sex, including oral, vaginal and anal intercourse, and intimate skin to skin contact can transmit infections through body fluids like blood, semen, vaginal secretions and saliva, as well as through bacteria.
- You and/or your sexual partner may not know that either of you have an STI and won't know that you may be spreading it.
- Always use condoms and/or dental dams during vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- If you haven't already, get vaccinated for HPV and hepatitis B.
- Get tested for STI regularly and before each new sexual partner. Request that your partner(s) do the same.
- Remember that you can get some STI by just touching or kissing an infected area.
- Be aware of your situation—you may take unnecessary risks when impaired by drugs or alcohol—always have a condom or dental dam accessible in case you are 'caught up in the moment.'
- If you use recreational drugs, or get tattoos, be sure that the needles are sterile and haven't been used by anyone else already.



*You matter.  
Your choices matter.  
You decide what is  
right for you.*

## Websites to visit

[SexandU.ca](https://sexandu.ca)

[catie.ca/en/home](https://catie.ca/en/home)

[canada.ca/en/public-health/  
services/sexual-health.html](https://canada.ca/en/public-health/services/sexual-health.html)

[canada.ca/en/public-health/services/  
infectious-diseases/sexual-health-  
sexually-transmitted-infections/  
canadian-guidelines/sexually-  
transmitted-infections.html](https://canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/sexual-health-sexually-transmitted-infections/canadian-guidelines/sexually-transmitted-infections.html)

## Where to go for help

If you have questions or want to be tested for STI, you can go to your healthcare provider, clinics offering anonymous testing, sexual health clinic or local public health unit.

