

# Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)



## Sexually Transmitted Infection (STIs)

STIs are infections that are passed on from an infected partner(s) during unprotected sex (vaginal, anal and oral). They are caused by specific bacteria and viruses. In some cases, you may be at risk even if you don't have full sex. Kissing and touching each other's genitals may pass on some STIs.

There are many different STIs – some are more common than others. Most can be cured with medication. However, some of them can only be treated to reduce symptoms but will stay in your system once you have been infected.



**Disclaimer:** This booklet is intended as a guide only. It is for your information and should not replace the advice of a doctor.

If you have any concerns about your sexual health, please talk to your GP or local STI/GUM clinic.

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## Words used in this booklet

**STI** – A sexually transmitted infection (STI) is an infection that can be passed on during sexual contact with someone who already has an STI. Also known as Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD).

**STI/GUM clinic** – STI/GUM stands for Sexually Transmitted / Genito Urinary Medicine. This is a type of clinic, usually attached to a hospital, that specialises in treating STIs. Throughout this booklet, we refer to ‘the clinic’ when we mean a STI/GUM clinic.

**Screening** – This means that you are tested for a full range of STIs at the same time. A screening can include blood tests and swabs.

**Unprotected sex** – This is also called unsafe sex and means that you do not use a condom (for vaginal or anal sex) or dental dam (for oral sex). A dental dam is a piece of latex that you put over the anus or vagina during oral sex.

## How would I know if I have an STI?

You might not know. Some STIs have no obvious symptoms, so you may not be aware that you or your partner(s) is infected. If you are sexually active, it is important to have regular check-ups. Some STIs can cause long-term problems if they are not treated, such as infertility, complications in pregnancy and pelvic inflammatory disease.

Remember, it is good sexual health practise to get an STI check regularly.

## Protecting yourself and your partner(s)

STIs are a worry, but the good news is that you can prevent them. If you decide to have sex, you can help reduce your risk if:

- you always use a condom, until you can be sure that you know your partner's sexual history;
- you limit the number of partners you have – the more partners you have, the greater your chance of coming into contact with an infected person; and
- you talk to your partner(s) about STIs so that you can both stay safe.

## Coping with an STI

If you are worried that you might have an STI, the first thing to do is to get checked out. Your doctor can arrange tests for you. You can also go to a clinic (see list on page ). The clinics are free and confidential.

They will offer you a range of tests for different STIs. They will also give you any treatment you need free of charge. Most STIs can be treated. To avoid long term complications, the sooner you receive treatment the better.

If you are diagnosed with an STI, you should tell your current or most recent partner(s) even if you find it difficult. They may be infected and not know it. If they are infected and are not treated, they could re-infect you, infect someone else or experience complications.

STIs don't always go away by themselves, so get checked out!

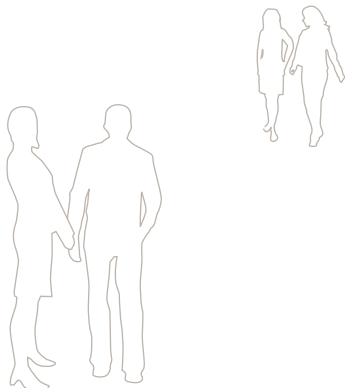
## Get your facts right

- You can get an STI the first time or anytime you have sex.
- You may not know if you have an STI.
- You may not be able to tell if your partner(s) has an STI.
- You can catch an STI more than once.
- You can be infected with more than one STI at a time.
- STI clinics are listed in the back of this book and the phone book in the green section. Look for your HSE area (formerly health board) under Community Care or Hospitals.

## What happens at the clinic?

You will need to make an appointment for most clinics, unless they provide a drop-in service. You don't have to be referred by or have a letter from your GP. The service is confidential. This means that you are identified by a number rather than by your name. The service is also free.

An STI screening can take around two hours. First, a doctor will take your sexual history. Don't worry about shocking them – they've heard it all before. Then you will have a series of tests. Blood tests are used to test for HIV, Hepatitis B and Syphilis.



Swabs are used to examine material from a discharge or an infected area. If you are having a HIV test, an advisor will talk you through it.

You may receive some results while you are at the clinic. If you need treatment, they will give you the medication there and then. This is free of charge. A sexual health advisor will meet you to explain safer sex practices, answer any questions you may have and discuss your results. You will get another appointment to come back for the rest of your results.

### **What men should expect**

- You will be asked not to urinate for at least four hours before your appointment.
- You may have a throat swab, penis swab and anal swab.

### **What women should expect**

- You may have a throat swab, vaginal swab and a cervical swab.



# Bacterial Vaginosis

## Description:

It is a condition caused by the overgrowth of normal vaginal bacteria.

## Effects:

It can cause problems in pregnancy such as premature labour and low birth weight.

It can contribute to pelvic inflammatory disease especially if you have a contraceptive coil in place.

## Cause:

Exact cause is not known. It affects women with many sexual partners and new sexual partners.

It may be triggered by sexual intercourse or a period.

## Symptoms:

No symptoms in most cases.

Abnormal vaginal discharge and smell.

Genital itching.

## Treatment:

Antibiotics.

## Prevention:

It is likely to come back in about one-fifth of cases, especially after your period or after sex.

Don't use harsh soaps, antiseptics and sprays in the vaginal area, as they can disrupt your vagina's normal balance.

**If you have any concerns about your sexual health or have any of the symptoms above...**



# Chlamydia

## Description:

It is a bacterial infection.

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

It can lead to problems such as pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

You can pass the infection to your baby during birth.

It can cause premature labour and low birth weight.

## Cause:

Intimate genital contact.

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Infected fingers to eyes.

Unprotected rimming (mouth to anus).

From a pregnant mother to her baby.

## Symptoms:

In around 80% of women and 50% of men with chlamydia will have no symptoms.

*Women:*

- Abnormal vaginal discharge
- Stinging or burning sensation when you pass urine
- Bleeding between periods or heavy periods
- Pain or bleeding during or after sex.

*Men:*

- Discharge from penis
- Stinging or burning sensation when you pass urine.

## Treatment:

Antibiotics – for you and your partner(s).

## Prevention:

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

*or*

Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

# Genital Herpes

## (Herpes Simplex Virus, HSV 1 and HSV2)

### Description:

It is a virus caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV). There are two types, HSV 1 and HSV 2.

### Effects:

You may pass it on to your sexual partner(s).  
You may pass it on to your baby during delivery.

### Cause:

Direct skin-to-skin contact.  
Unprotected vagina, anal or oral sex.  
Unprotected rimming (mouth to anus).  
From a pregnant mother to her baby.

### Symptoms:

Most people who carry the virus have no symptoms.  
*During an outbreak you may have:*  
Flu-like symptoms  
Painful blisters or ulcers on your external genitals and rectum  
A burning sensation when you pass urine.

### Treatment:

Prescribed medication can reduce discomfort during an outbreak. The virus will stay in your system, so you may have further outbreaks. These outbreaks are usually less severe.

### Prevention:

Don't have sex while you or your partner(s) has an outbreak.  
Don't have intimate sexual contact.  
*or*  
Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

**If you have any concerns about your sexual health or have any of the symptoms above...**

# Genital Warts (Human Papilloma Virus, HPV)

## Description:

It is a virus caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

## Effects:

Some types of the virus are associated with cervical cancer in women, so you should follow up with your doctor for a smear test.

## Cause:

Direct skin-to-skin contact.

Vaginal, anal or oral sex (protected and unprotected).

## Symptoms:

The virus can be in your system for 3 weeks to 8 months (or longer) before you show symptoms.

Warts usually appear as single or more painless, fleshy growths or lumps in the genital area. They come in different shapes and sizes.

You may not have visible warts, but can still pass the virus on to your sexual partner(s).

## Treatment:

There are a few treatments available, such as freezing the warts and prescribed creams. The type of treatment will depend on the size, location and number of warts.

The virus will stay in your system, so the warts may come back.

## Prevention:

Don't have intimate sexual contact. Using a condom may not protect you against genital warts.

# Gonorrhoea

## Description:

It is a bacterial infection.

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

You can pass it on to your baby at birth.

It can cause problems such as pre-term labour and low birth weight.

Other long term complications include pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

## Cause:

Intimate genital contact.

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Infected fingers to eyes.

Unprotected rimming (mouth to anus contact).

From an infected mother to her baby at birth.

## Symptoms:

Around 70% of women and 5-10% men who are infected will have no symptoms.

*Women:*

- Abnormal vaginal or anal discharge
- Burning or stinging sensation when you pass urine
- Pain during or after sex
- May be bleeding between periods.

*Men:*

- Abnormal discharge from penis
- Burning or stinging sensation when you pass urine.

## Treatment:

Antibiotics – for you and your partner(s).

## Prevention:

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

*or*

Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

**If you have any concerns about your sexual health or have any of the symptoms above...**

# Hepatitis A

## Description:

It is a viral infection that affects the liver and blood.

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

## Cause:

Unprotected rimming (mouth to anus contact).  
Through contaminated food or water.

## Symptoms:

Around 50% of people infected have no symptoms.  
Flu-like symptoms.  
Jaundice (yellow colouring of the eyes and skin).  
Nausea.  
Tiredness.

## Treatment:

You may need medical treatment.

## Prevention:

Get a Hepatitis A vaccination free from your GUM/STI clinic.  
Don't have intimate sexual contact.  
*or*  
Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

# Hepatitis B

## Description:

It is a viral infection that affects the liver and blood.

## Effects:

Long term complications can include liver failure and cirrhosis of the liver.

Increased risk of miscarriage or premature labour.

You can pass it on to your baby during pregnancy.

## Cause:

Through blood and other body fluids.

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

From an infected mother to baby during pregnancy.

Sharing drug using equipment with an infected person.

Tattoos, acupuncture and piercings with non-sterilised equipment.

## Symptoms:

Around 10-50% of people infected have no symptoms.

Flu-like symptoms.

Fever.

Jaundice (yellow colouring of the eyes and skin).

Nausea.

Tiredness.

## Treatment:

You may need medical treatment.

You should stop or reduce the amount of alcohol you drink to reduce further strain on your liver.

## Prevention:

Get a Hepatitis B vaccination free from your GUM/STI clinic.

Don't share needles with drug users.

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

*or*

Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

**If you have any concerns about your sexual health or have any of the symptoms above...**

# HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

## Description:

It is a virus caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus).

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

You can infect your baby during pregnancy and birth.

You may get AIDS (Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome). This happens when the virus breaks down your immune system until it gets to a stage when you cannot fight certain infections.

## Cause:

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

From a HIV positive mother to her baby during pregnancy, at birth or in breast milk.

Sharing drug using equipment with an infected person.

## Symptoms:

There are usually no obvious symptoms in the early years.

## Treatment:

Prescribed HIV medication.

## Prevention:

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

*or*

Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

Don't share needles.

If you are pregnant or planning pregnancy, have a HIV test.

# Molluscum Contagiosum

## Description:

It is a viral infection caused by the molluscum contagiosum virus.

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

## Cause:

Direct skin-to-skin contact.

Vaginal, oral or anal sex (protected or unprotected).

## Symptoms:

Pearly smooth fluid-filled bumps on your skin. They are most common in the genital area, the inner thighs and the lower abdomen.

## Treatment:

Freezing the lumps using a special technique. The virus stays in your system so the lumps may come back.

## Prevention:

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

*or*

Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.



# Non-specific infections

## Description:

These are group of infections caused by various bacteria.

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

It may lead to further complications; your doctor can give you more information.

## Cause:

Intimate genital contact.

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Infected fingers to eyes.

Unprotected rimming (mouth to anus contact).

From an infected pregnant mother to her baby.

Or the cause may be unknown

## Symptoms:

You may have no symptoms.

*Women:*

- Abnormal vaginal discharge.
- Vulval irritation.
- Stinging or burning sensation when you pass urine.

*Men:*

- Discharge from penis.
- Stinging or burning sensation when you pass urine.

## Treatment:

Antibiotics – for you and your partner(s).

## Prevention:

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

*or*

Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

# Pubic Lice (crabs)

## Description:

They are tiny insects, like head lice, that live in pubic or body hair.

## Effects:

The itching will continue and get worse.

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

## Cause:

Close body contact with an infected person.

Rarely, infected bed linen or clothes may pass on the lice.

## Symptoms:

Itching in your pubic hair.

You may be able to see the lice.

## Treatment:

It can be treated with creams and lotions – for you and your partner(s).

You can buy these at a chemist, however, you should also have a full STI check.

## Prevention:

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

Using condom may not protect you against pubic lice.

# Scabies

## **Description:**

It is a parasitic mite.

## **Effects:**

It spreads and the symptoms get worse.  
You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

## **Cause:**

Close body contact with an infected person  
Rarely, infected bed linen or clothes may transmit the mite.

## **Symptoms:**

Itching, especially at night.  
Silvery lines on your skin and between your fingers.

## **Treatment:**

It can be treated with lotions – for you and your partner(s).

## **Prevention:**

Avoid skin-to-skin contact with an infected person.

# Syphilis

## Description:

It is a bacterial infection.

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).

You can pass it on to your baby during pregnancy.

## Cause:

Intimate genital contact.

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Unprotected rimming (mouth to anus contact).

Kissing an infected person.

From an infected pregnant mother to her baby.

## Symptoms:

There are three stages to the infection and the symptoms are the same for men and women.

### **Stage 1 – Primary infection**

*Incubation period:* 9 to 90 days

*Symptoms:* Usually appear around three weeks after exposure as a painless ulcer (similar to a cold sore) in the genital, anal or mouth area.

### **Stage 2 – Secondary infection**

*Incubation period:* 6 weeks to 6 months

*Symptoms:* Red spotty rash develops, typically on the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet, but it may also appear elsewhere on your body.

### **Stage 3 – Tertiary syphilis**

*Incubation period:* Can happen months or years after initial infection

*Symptoms:* Rare, but there is a possibility of long-term damage to your heart and brain.

**If you have any concerns about your sexual health or have any of the symptoms above...**

**Treatment:**

Antibiotics – for you and your partner.

Follow-up blood tests to make sure the infection is cleared.

**Prevention:**

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

*or*

Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

# Trichomonas Vaginalis (TV)

## Description:

It is a parasitic infection.

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).  
It may cause problems in pregnancy such as premature labour and low birth weight.

## Cause:

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.  
Intimate genital contact.

## Symptoms:

Infected women may have no symptoms and around 50% of infected man may have no symptoms.

*Women:*

- Abnormal vaginal discharge.
- Vaginal discomfort.
- Burning or stinging sensation when you pass urine.
- Offensive smell.

*Men:*

- Discharge from penis.
- Rash on the penis.
- Rarely, burning or stinging sensation when you pass urine.

## Treatment:

Antibiotics – for you and your partner(s).

## Prevention:

Don't have intimate sexual contact.

*or*

Have safer sex – always use a new condom correctly and put it on before you have sex.

# Thrush (Candida)

## Description:

It is a yeast infection. Yeast is common around the mouth and genitals, especially the vagina, but does not cause symptoms until it multiplies. It is not considered a sexually transmitted infection, but it can be passed on through sexual contact.

## Effects:

You can pass it on to your sexual partner(s).  
Symptoms can go away without treatment.

## Cause:

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

## Symptoms:

You may have no symptoms.  
Genital itching or soreness.  
Thick vaginal discharge usually with no smells.  
Discomfort during sex.

## Treatment:

Thrush is treated with anti-fungal creams, vaginal pessaries or prescribed tablets.  
Avoid using soaps in the genital area. Pregnancy and antibiotics may make it worse.

## Prevention:

Don't use perfumed soaps, sprays or shower gels around your genital area.  
Wear cotton underwear.  
Eat a healthy varied diet.

# Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

## Description:

It is usually a complication of chlamydia and gonorrhoea in women but may also be caused by bacterial vaginosis and other infections.

## Effects:

The infection can spread to the reproductive system and surrounding area.

Infertility.

Ectopic pregnancy.

Long term pain.

## Cause:

Unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Intimate genital contact.

## Symptoms:

Pain in your lower abdomen.

Pain during sex.

Abnormal bleeding between periods.

Painful periods.

Abnormal vaginal discharge.

## Treatment:

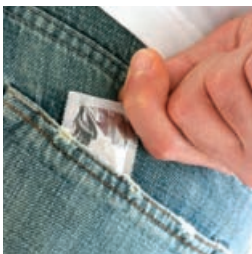
Antibiotics.



## Condoms

Using condoms or talking about them doesn't have to be boring and awkward! You can put a condom on as part of foreplay. Ask your partner(s) to put your condom on.

When used correctly every time you have sex, condoms can help protect you against many (but not all) STIs.



## What do I need?

Have your own condoms and water-based lubricant (if you need lubricant).

Use a new condom with a quality mark on the pack as shown below and check the expiry date.



Talk to your partner(s) about using a condom before you start having sex.

Put some in your pocket or handbag before your leave for a night out.



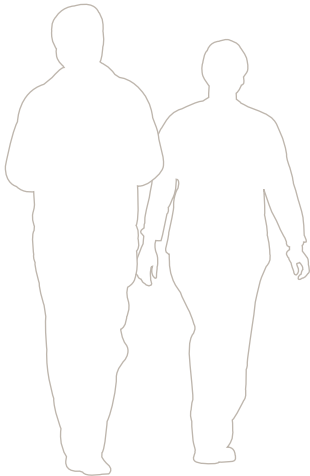
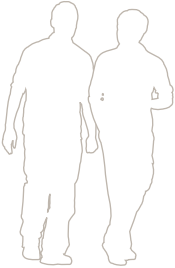
## How do I use a condom properly?



1. Open the condom package carefully to avoid damaging it with fingernails, teeth or scissors.
2. When your penis is hard, put the condom on before you enter your partner's body.
3. Unroll the condom a little bit to make sure you are doing it the right way. The rolled ring should be on the outside.
4. Hold the tip of the condom and unroll it down to the base of your erect penis. If the condom does not unroll easily, it is probably inside-out. Throw it away and start again with a new one.
5. If you need lubrication, put some on your partner's vagina or anus and over your condom-covered penis. Use only water-based lubricants, such as KY jelly. Oil-based lubricants like cream, petroleum jelly, body lotions, massage oil or baby oil can damage the condom.
6. If a condom breaks while you're having sex, stop right away and put a new condom on. You should check occasionally that the condom is in place.
7. If you think some semen (cum) has escaped from the condom and you may be pregnant or have an STI, talk to your doctor.

## What do I do after sex?

1. Soon after you come, withdraw your penis while it is still erect.
2. Hold the condom firmly against the base of your penis to stop the semen (cum) leaking.
3. Check the condom for visible damage, then wrap it in tissue and throw it in the bin. Don't flush condoms down the toilet.



## STI/GUM Clinics

Clinic	Phone
Youth Health Service, Cork City	021 422 0490 / 1
Gay Men's Health Project, Dublin 4	01 6699 553
GUIDE Clinic, St. James Hospital, Dublin 8	01 4162 315
Mater Hospital, Dublin 7	01 8032 063
Regional Hospital, Waterford City	051 842 646
General Hospital, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary	051 842 646
District Hospital, Carlow	051 842 646
Victoria Hospital, Cork City	021 4966 844
Regional Hospital, Tralee, Co. Kerry	021 4966 844
Regional Hospital, Limerick City	061 482 382
General Hospital, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary	061 482 382
General Hospital, Ennis, Co. Clare	061 482 382
General Hospital, Castlebar, Co. Mayo	094 9021 733 (extension 2456)
University Hospital, Galway City	091 525 200

Clinic	Phone
Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway	090 9648 372 (extension 676)
Regional Hospital, Sligo Town	071 9170 473
Altnagalvin Hospital, Derry City	(048 from Rol) 028 71 611 269
Coleraine Hospital, Co. Derry	(048 from Rol) 028 703 460 248
Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast City	(048 from Rol) 028 90 634 050
Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry, Co. Down	(048 from Rol) 028 3083 5050

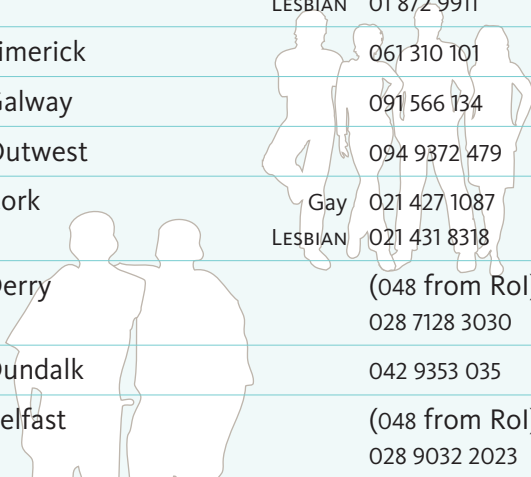
While outpatient clinics are held in many local hospitals, they may be organised by the nearest main hospital. The number listed is the one you need to ring for an appointment.

## Sexual Health Information and Support

There are sexual health support services throughout the country. For details of these services:

- visit [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie) or [www.hivireland.ie](http://www.hivireland.ie)
- phone the HSE Infoline 1850 24 1850 or the helplines listed below

## LBG (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay) Helplines



Dublin	Gay	01 8721 055
	LESBIAN	01 872 9911
Limerick		061 310 101
Galway		091 566 134
Outwest		094 9372 479
Cork	Gay	021 427 1087
	LESBIAN	021 431 8318
Derry		(048 from Rol) 028 7128 3030
Dundalk		042 9353 035
Belfast		(048 from Rol) 028 9032 2023

Greenbow: [deafgreenbowlgbt@yahoo.ie](mailto:deafgreenbowlgbt@yahoo.ie)  
or [www.greenbowdeaf.com](http://www.greenbowdeaf.com)

HIV/Drugs Helpline 1800 459 459

Northern Ireland HIV Helpline 0800 137 427



This booklet is based on the STI Booklet (2007) produced by the Sexual Health Forum HSE South (a forum of HSE staff and NGO's working in the area of sexual health).

[www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)



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Plain English  
Approved by NALA