Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

STIs are infections that can be passed from an infected person to another during any sexual contact. Vaginal and anal sex is the most likely way to get an STI, but oral sex can also transmit most STIs. Using a condom will greatly reduce the risk of any STI being transmitted. STIs can be caused by a variety of organisms including bacteria and viruses.

People who have had unprotected sex with a casual partner are the most likely to have an infection, but anyone who has ever had sex could have an STI. Even if someone feels well, and does not have casual sex, unless they have had a test they might have an infection. Regular yearly check-ups are recommended for people at high-risk, including everyone under 25.

**What are the common STIs?**

Chlamydia, gonorrhoea and trichomonas:
- infect the penis, vagina and sometimes the anus and mouth
- are transmitted by vaginal, anal and oral sex
- do not develop any symptoms in most people
- men can get discharge from their penis, pain on urinating or painful testicles (balls)
- women can get vaginal discharge, irregular vaginal bleeding or pelvic pain, especially during sex.

Genital herpes:
- caused by herpes simplex viruses type 1 and 2
- transmitted by genital skin to skin contact
- causes recurrent painful genital sores.

There is no cure but medication can reduce the severity of symptoms.

Genital warts:
- caused by human papilloma viruses
- transmitted by genital skin to skin contact
- causes painless genital lumps
- treatable with paints and creams.

Syphilis:
- transmitted by vaginal, anal and oral sex
- causes painless genital sores, rashes, and if not treated serious brain and heart problems.

HIV:
- transmitted by vaginal and anal sex and sharing injection equipment
- weakens the immune system leading to serious infections
- there is no cure but if detected early medicine can keep people well.

**What problems can STIs cause?**

Although most STIs are easily treatable, they are one of the most common reasons people become infertile. They can also cause very serious medical problems like ectopic pregnancy (where a foetus starts to grow in the fallopian tube and not the uterus and requires surgery and may, if undetected, cause death) and epididymitis (an infection in a man’s balls). Having an STI also makes it much easier to catch and pass on HIV infection. A woman with an STI can pass the infection to her baby.

**How can I get a sexual health check-up?**

It’s easy to get tested for STIs at Clinic 34 or a GP. Usually you can collect your own tests in privacy without getting undressed and...
you do not even need to give your name at Clinic 34. Usually your doctor will offer you a blood test for HIV as well.

**Prevention of STIs**

The best way to protect yourself from getting an STI is to:

- use condoms and lube every time you have sex
- have sex with 1 partner where both of you have been tested for STIs and neither of you have sex outside of your relationship.

Condoms do not provide complete protection against herpes, warts or syphilis.

**Further fact sheets are available at:**

**For more information contact Clinic 34**

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