
Sexually transmissible infections - signs and symptoms

If you develop symptoms that you think could be caused by a sexually transmissible infection (STI), it's a good idea to talk to your doctor or sexual health service as soon as possible. Don't try to diagnose your symptoms yourself and remember that **not all** genital symptoms are caused by an STI.

You may be at risk of an STI if you have unprotected sex (oral, vaginal and anal sex without a condom) with a new partner or if your current partner has an infection.

You can have an STI without developing any signs or symptoms. See your doctor or sexual health service for a check-up if you think you have been exposed to an STI.

How to reduce your risk

If you always use condoms (male or female) and dams (thin latex sheets), and use them correctly, you will reduce your risk of getting most STIs. Using barrier protection will not completely remove all risk, but can effectively reduce the risk of infections.

Signs and symptoms

It is important to discuss any signs and symptoms you think may be caused by an STI with your doctor, nurse or sexual health clinician. Many people who have an STI do not develop any symptoms and may not be aware they have an infection that can be passed on to their sexual contacts.

When STIs **do** produce signs and symptoms, they usually develop on the genital area. Your sexual contacts may also experience signs and symptoms. Generally, the signs and symptoms of STIs can include:

- Discharge from the penis, vagina or anus
- Pain or discomfort when urinating
- Pain during sex
- Abnormal or unusual vaginal bleeding
- Lumps and bumps on the genitals
- Genital sores
- Genital itching
- Genital irritation or pain
- Rash on genitals.

If you experience any of these symptoms, it is important to be reviewed a health professional for an examination and testing.

Getting tested

The only way to check if you have a sexually transmissible infection is to have a sexual health check-up. Doctors deal with sexual health problems on a daily basis, so don't be embarrassed to ask for help.

Sexual health check-ups are easy to do. In most cases it involves only a simple urine test. Some infections can be diagnosed on the day and treated at the time of your visit. Other results may take up to a week.

When to be tested

For people with no symptoms, testing for STIs depends on how sexually active you are and whether you use condoms consistently. It is recommended that you get tested:

- After any unprotected sexual contact with a new or casual sexual partner
- After any unprotected sex, if you know or suspect that your partner has had other sexual partners
- After any unwanted or non-consensual sexual contact
- After any unprotected sexual contact in countries where HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is prevalent.

If you are a man who has sex with other men, it is important to get regular check-ups for STIs, including HIV and syphilis – **at least** every year. You should have more frequent (three-monthly) check-ups if you have a number of sexual partners.

Contacting sexual partners

Your sexual contacts may or may not experience signs and symptoms. It is important to contact any sexual partners you have had so they can get tested and decide about having treatment. This is an essential part of reducing the spread of STIs in our community.

Most people appreciate being told that they might have an infection, as often they are unaware that they have an STI. Your doctor or sexual health service can help you contact partners.

Where to get help

You can contact the following services for help and further advice.

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- The Action Centre (for young people under 25 years) Tel. (03) 9654 4766 or 1800 013 952
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. (03) 9257 0100 or 1800 013 952
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9341 6200 or 1800 032 017 or TTY (for the hearing impaired) (03) 9347 8619
- Victorian AIDS Council – Gay Men’s Health Centre Tel. (03) 9865 6700 or 1800 134 840
- HIV – Sexual Health Connect Tel. 1800 038 125
- The Women’s Health Information Centre (WHIC) Tel. (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 442 007
- Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Sexual Health Clinic Wodonga Tel. (02) 6022 8888

Things to remember

- If you think you may have been in contact with someone who has a STI, you should have an STI check-up even if you don’t have any signs or symptoms. Check-ups can be done by your local doctor or a sexual health service.
- Annual STI screening is a good way to look after your sexual health.
- Your doctor or sexual health service are the only ones who can accurately diagnose an infection.
- Not all genital symptoms are caused by an STI, so be wary of self-diagnosis. Check with your doctor first.
- Condoms are the best way to protect yourself from a STI.
- Your doctor or sexual health clinician is experienced in dealing with STIs and understand that it can be embarrassing and distressing.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre

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