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Sexually Transmitted Infections

Also called: Sexually transmitted diseases, STDs, STIs, Venereal disease

What are sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections that are passed from one person to another through sexual contact. If not treated, a STI can develop into a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

STIs are usually spread during vaginal, oral, or anal sex. But sometimes they can spread through other sexual contact involving the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus. This is because some STIs, like herpes and HPV, are spread by skin-to-skin contact.

Some STIs can be passed to the fetus during pregnancy [<https://medlineplus.gov/pregnancy.html>] or childbirth. Other ways that some STIs may spread include while breastfeeding [<https://medlineplus.gov/breastfeeding.html>] , through blood transfusions [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodtransfusionanddonation.html>] , or by sharing needles.

There are more than 20 types of STIs, including:

- Chlamydia [<https://medlineplus.gov/chlamydiainfections.html>]
- Genital herpes [<https://medlineplus.gov/genitalherpes.html>]
- Genital warts [<https://medlineplus.gov/genitalwarts.html>]
- Gonorrhea [<https://medlineplus.gov/gonorrhea.html>]
- HIV [<https://medlineplus.gov/hiv.html>]
- HPV [<https://medlineplus.gov/hpv.html>]
- Pubic lice [<https://medlineplus.gov/publiclice.html>]
- Syphilis [<https://medlineplus.gov/syphilis.html>]
- Trichomoniasis [<https://medlineplus.gov/trichomoniasis.html>]

What causes sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

STIs can be caused by bacteria [<https://medlineplus.gov/bacterialinfections.html>] , viruses [<https://medlineplus.gov/viralinfections.html>] , and parasites [<https://medlineplus.gov/parasiticdiseases.html>] .

Who is affected by sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

Most STIs affect both men and women, but in many cases the health problems they cause can be more severe for women. If an STI is passed to a fetus during pregnancy or childbirth [<https://medlineplus.gov/infectionsandpregnancy.html>] , it can cause serious health problems.

What are the symptoms of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

STIs don't always cause symptoms or may only cause mild symptoms. So, it is possible to have an infection and not know it. And even without symptoms, STIs can still be harmful and may be passed on during sex.

If you do have symptoms, they could include:

- Unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- Sores or warts on the genital area
- Painful or frequent urination (peeing)
- Itching and redness in the genital area
- Blisters or sores in or around the mouth
- Abnormal vaginal odor
- Anal itching, soreness, or bleeding
- Abdominal (belly) pain [<https://medlineplus.gov/abdominalpain.html>]
- Fever [<https://medlineplus.gov/fever.html>]

How are sexually transmitted infections (STIs) diagnosed?

If you are sexually active, you should talk to your health care provider about your risk for STIs and whether you need to be tested. This is especially important since many STIs do not usually cause symptoms.

Some STIs may be diagnosed during a physical exam or through STI testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/sexually-transmitted-infection-sti-tests/>] . Some tests involve a microscopic examination of a sore or fluid swabbed from the vagina, penis, or anus. Blood tests can diagnose other types of STIs.

What are the treatments for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

Antibiotics [<https://medlineplus.gov/antibiotics.html>] can treat STIs that are caused by bacteria or parasites. There is no cure for STIs caused by viruses, but antiviral medicines can often help with the symptoms and lower your risk of spreading the infection.

It's important to get treatment if you have an STI. Some types of STIs can cause serious health problems if they are not treated. Talk to your provider about how long to not have sex after treatment to avoid passing the infection back and forth with your partner.

Can sexually transmitted infections (STIs) be prevented?

The surest way to protect yourself against STIs is to not have sex.

If you do decide to have sex, you can lower your risk of getting an STI by:

- Having you and your partner tested for STIs before having sex.
- Using a condom every time you have sex. Correct usage of latex condoms greatly reduces, but does not eliminate, the risk of catching or spreading STIs. If your or your partner is allergic to latex [<https://medlineplus.gov/latexallergy.html>] , you can use polyurethane condoms.
- Reducing your number of sex partners. You might even consider "mutual monogamy" with just one partner. This means that you agree to be sexually active only with them, and they agree to be sexually active only with you. But first you should both get tested to make sure that you don't already have an STI.
- Getting vaccinated against HPV and hepatitis B [<https://medlineplus.gov/hepatitisb.html>] .

Start Here

- Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/stds>]
 (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
- Sexually Transmitted Infections [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/sexually-transmitted-infections>]
 (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases)

Symptoms

- Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Symptoms [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/sexually-transmitted-diseases-stds/in-depth/std-symptoms/ART-20047081?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/sexually-transmitted-diseases-stds/in-depth/std-symptoms/art-20047081?p=1>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- Genital Problems in Men [<https://familydoctor.org/symptom/genital-problems-men/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/sintoma/problemas-de-los-genitales-en-los-hombres/?adfree=true>]
- Genital Problems in Women [<https://familydoctor.org/symptom/genital-problems-women/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/sintoma/genital-problems-in-women/?adfree=true>]
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Why Testing Is Important [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/sexually-transmitted/pages/Diagnostic-Testing-for-Sexually-Transmitted-Infections.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
- STD Testing: What's Right for You [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/sexually-transmitted-diseases-stds/in-depth/std-testing/ART-20046019?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/sexually-transmitted-diseases-stds/in-depth/std-testing/art-20046019?p=1>]
- STD Tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/std-tests/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-enfermedades-de-transmision-sexual-ets/>]

Prevention and Risk Factors

- How to Prevent STIs [<https://www.cdc.gov/sti/prevention/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Treatments and Therapies

- What Are the Treatments for Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STDs/STIs)? [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/stds/conditioninfo/treatments>]
 (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/stds/informacion/tratamientos>]

Related Issues

- Cervicitis [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/cervicitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20370814?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/cervicitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20370814?p=1>]
- Hepatitis B [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/hepatitis-b/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/hepatitis-b-es/?adfree=true>]

Specifics

- Can You Use Two Condoms for Extra Protection? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/2-condoms.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/2-condoms.html>]
- Molluscum Contagiosum [<https://www.cdc.gov/molluscum-contagiosum/about/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- What Are Some Types of and Treatments for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) or Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)? [<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/stds/conditioninfo/types>]
 (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/stds/informacion/tipos>]
- What's a Finger Condom? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/finger-condom.html>] (Nemours Foundation) - In English and Spanish

Images

- Lymphogranuloma Venereum (LGV) [<https://skinsight.com/skin-conditions/lymphogranuloma-venereum-lgv/?lmiw9cApl=1>] (VisualDX)
- Molluscum Contagiosum [<https://skinsight.com/skin-conditions/molluscum-contagiosum/?lmiw9cApl=1>] (VisualDX)
- Pubic Lice (Pediculosis Pubis) [<https://skinsight.com/skin-conditions/pediculosis-pubis-public-lice/?lmiw9cApl=1>] (VisualDX)

Test Your Knowledge

- STI Myths & Facts Quiz [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/001949_14.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/001949_74.htm]

Statistics and Research

- FastStats: Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) [<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/stds.htm>]
(National Center for Health Statistics)
- Sexually Transmitted Infections Surveillance 2023 [<https://www.cdc.gov/sti-statistics/annual/>]
 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Sexually Transmitted Diseases [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Sexually+Transmitted+Diseases%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Impact of doxycycline pre-exposure prophylaxis (doxyPrEP) for sexually transmitted infections on... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40610420>]
- Article: Understanding barriers and facilitators to doxycycline post-exposure prophylaxis adherence among young... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40597823>]
- Article: Peer education intervention reduced sexually transmitted infections among male Tajik labor... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40495129>]
- Sexually Transmitted Infections -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Sexually+Transmitted+Diseases%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bdat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [<https://www.cdc.gov/>]
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/>]
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/>] 

Teenagers

- Can I Get Checked for STDs Without My Parents Knowing? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/stds-check.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/stds-check.html>]
- Do You Have to See a Doctor to Find Out if You Have an STD? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/std-diagnosis.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/std-diagnosis.html>]
- Getting Tested for STDs [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/std-testing.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/std-testing.html>]
- Pubic Lice (Crabs) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/pubic-lice.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/pubic-lice.html>]
- STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/std.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/std.html>]
- Talking to Your Kids About STDs [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/stds-talk.html>] (Nemours Foundation)

Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/stds-talk.html>]

- Talking to Your Partner about Condoms [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/talk-about-condoms.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/talk-about-condoms.html>]
- Talking to Your Partner about STDs [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/the-talk.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/the-talk.html>]
- Telling Your Partner You Have an STD [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/stds-talk.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/stds-talk.html>]
- What's a Finger Condom? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/finger-condom.html>] (Nemours Foundation) - **In English and Spanish Men**
- About STIs and Gay Men [<https://www.cdc.gov/sti/about/about-stis-and-gay-men.html>]
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/sti/es/about/acerca-de-las-infecciones-de-transmision-sexual-y-los-hombres-gais.html>]
- How Can Men Reduce the Risk of Getting a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD)?
[<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/menshealth/conditioninfo/risk>]
 (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.nichd.nih.gov/salud/temas/menshealth/informacion/riesgo>]

Women

- About STIs and Pregnancy [<https://www.cdc.gov/sti/about/about-stis-and-pregnancy.html>]
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/sti/es/about/acerca-de-las-infecciones-de-transmision-sexual-y-el-embarazo.html>]
- Sexually Transmitted Infections [<https://womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/sexually-transmitted-infections>]
(Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/sexually-transmitted-infections>]
- Sexually Transmitted Infections, Pregnancy, and Breastfeeding [<https://womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/stis-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding>]
(Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/stis-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding>]

Older Adults

- Safe Sex for Older Adults [<https://www.healthinaging.org/tools-and-tips/tip-sheet-safe-sex-older-adults>]
(AGS Health in Aging Foundation)

Patient Handouts

- Chancroid [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000635.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000635.htm>]
- Condom Use: An Overview [<https://www.cdc.gov/condom-use/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Donovanosis (granuloma inguinale) [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000636.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000636.htm>]
- Genital sores - female [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003222.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003222.htm>]
- Genital sores - male [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003221.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003221.htm>]
- Safe sex [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001949.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001949.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Cervicitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001495.htm>]

Chancroid [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000635.htm>]

Donovanosis (granuloma inguinale) [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000636.htm>]

Endocervical culture [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003754.htm>]

Epididymitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001279.htm>]

Genital sores - female [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003222.htm>]

Genital sores - male [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003221.htm>]

Gram stain of urethral discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003749.htm>]

Molluscum contagiosum [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000826.htm>]

Orchitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001280.htm>]

Pubic lice [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000841.htm>]

Safe sex [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001949.htm>]

Urethral discharge culture [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003750.htm>]

Urethritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000439.htm>]

Urination - painful [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003145.htm>]

Vaginal itching and discharge - adult and adolescent [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003158.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Chlamydia Infections [<https://medlineplus.gov/chlamydiainfections.html>]

Genital Herpes [<https://medlineplus.gov/genitalherpes.html>]

Genital Warts [<https://medlineplus.gov/genitalwarts.html>]

Gonorrhea [<https://medlineplus.gov/gonorrhea.html>]

HIV [<https://medlineplus.gov/hiv.html>]

HPV [<https://medlineplus.gov/hpv.html>]

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/pelvicinflammatorydisease.html>]

Pubic Lice [<https://medlineplus.gov/publiclice.html>]

[Syphilis](https://medlineplus.gov/syphilis.html) [https://medlineplus.gov/syphilis.html]

[Trichomoniasis](https://medlineplus.gov/trichomoniasis.html) [https://medlineplus.gov/trichomoniasis.html]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Sexually Transmitted Infections* is the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English

[<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/sexuallytransmittedinfections.html>] on *Sexually Transmitted Infections*

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