



Beforeplay – it's the test part *before* the best part

All you need to know about STI testing

STIs are common – it's a fact

Sexually transmissible infections (STIs) are common and they're nothing to be embarrassed about.

1 in 6 Australians will get an STI in their lifetime. Yep, they're that common – but they don't have to be!

The good news is, there are easy steps you can take to look after your sexual health. By making regular STI testing and safe sex part of your *Beforeplay*, you can help protect yourself and your partner(s) from STIs. It's that simple – let us tell you how.

But first up – what are STIs?

STIs occur when viruses, bacteria or parasites are passed on through unprotected sexual contact. This includes vaginal, oral and anal sex, and skin-to-skin contact. Some STIs can be passed from a pregnant person to their child during pregnancy and birth.

STIs include:

- Chlamydia
- Herpes simplex virus
- Gonorrhoea
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection
- Mpox (formerly Monkeypox)
- Syphilis.

You could have an STI and not even realise

STIs can affect anyone who is sexually active, no matter your age, gender, relationship status or sexual orientation. Most importantly, STIs often have **no symptoms**.

That's why it's important to stay on top of your sexual health and test regularly. Symptoms vary depending on the STI and your gender. If you find any unusual things happening, you should talk to a healthcare professional about it.

Common symptoms include:

- Swelling, itching, or a rash on the genitals or surrounding area or contact area, e.g., around the anus and mouth.
- Bumps, sores or warts on the genitals or surrounding area or contact area, e.g., around the anus and mouth.
- Unusual discharge from the vagina, penis or anus, including bleeding.
- Skin changes including sores or ulcers.
- Pain when urinating.
- Pain during sex.
- Irregular bleeding, especially between periods and after sex.

Having sex? Get tested regularly

If you're having sex, you should get a regular sexual health check, even if you use protection every time and feel healthy. You should encourage your sexual partner(s) to do the same.

Make sure you book an STI test if:

- you have symptoms
- you change sexual partners
- you've had unprotected sex
- it's been a while since your last check-up
- you're pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

Your healthcare provider can give you advice about how often to get your regular test.

Always be prepared for safe sex – use protection

- Use condom-safe lubricants (e.g. water or silicone based) to help stop condoms from breaking.
- Use condoms or dental dams during oral sex to help prevent the spread of STIs.
- Use a new condom every time you switch between oral, anal or vaginal sex.

Condoms don't prevent all STIs all the time, so anyone who is sexually active should have regular sexual health check-ups.

Don't ignore it – get it sorted

The key to treating STIs and reducing transmission is early detection and treatment.

Regular sexual health check-ups are the only way to know for sure if you have an STI.

It's important as some STIs can cause serious health issues, like permanent damage to your reproductive system, which can lead to infertility and chronic pain.

They can also cause irritation and unwanted symptoms that may keep coming back (pain when you urinate, change in discharge, itchiness).

Remember that most STIs are easily treatable if detected early, and usually curable – definitely good reasons to add regular testing to the top of your to-do list.

Don't stress – sexual health check-ups are quick and easy

With busy lives, it's easy for a sexual health check to fall down to the bottom of your to do-list, but STI testing is simple and over before you know it (kind of like that task you put off for six months and then it only took you 15 minutes to do...).

Sexual health check-ups are also just part of the job for your healthcare professional. Don't worry, they do this all the time. You can talk openly about your sexual health and ask any questions you may have - they're here to help.

During the consult, your healthcare professional will ask you about your sex life and discuss how often you should get an STI test, based on your personal situation. They will also chat to you about treating and managing an STI, if you need it. This information stays between you and them.

Tests vary, but you may be asked for a blood or urine sample. Sometimes, you may need to provide a swab sample too, which you can usually do yourself.

Beforeplay – It's the test part *before* the best part.

Where can I get an STI test?

You can get a test at:

- Your healthcare provider or any GP
- Sexual and reproductive health services
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations
- Community health centres
- Medicare Urgent Care Clinics.

Positive test result? Just follow a few steps

1 Talk to your healthcare professional and get treatment

Once your healthcare professional receives your test results, they will contact you to discuss next steps, including treatment options. STI treatment differs based on what STI you have. Some STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis can be cured with medication. Other STIs such as herpes and HIV can't be cured but they can be treated or managed effectively. In most cases, there are treatments to help control the virus and help prevent symptoms and onward transmission to sexual partners.

2 Get in touch with your recent sexual partners

If you are nervous about telling recent sexual partners, talk to your healthcare professional who will be able to provide advice and can work with you to decide an appropriate method. Online tools such as letthemknow.org.au or bettertoknow.org.au can help people who have been diagnosed with an STI to notify their sexual partners via email or SMS that they might be at risk. This service is free and you can remain anonymous if you prefer.

Resources

Department of Health and Aged Care
health.gov.au/STI

Health Direct Service Finder
healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services

Emen8 Service Finder
emen8.com.au/find-a-service/

Health Direct
healthdirect.gov.au/sexually-transmitted-infections-sti



Staying on top of your sexual health means you can enjoy the moment knowing you're both protected.

Use protection and book a check-up today.
Visit health.gov.au/STI for more information.

