



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

Young women & Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) – the stuff you should know

Sexually transmissible infections (STIs) are common – in fact 1 in 6 people will get an STI in their lifetime. Yep, they're that common – but the good news is they don't have to be!

By making regular STI testing and safe sex part of your *Beforeplay*, you can help protect yourself and your partner(s) from STIs.

Am I at risk of getting an STI?

Anyone who is sexually active can get an STI, but they are most common in young people aged 34 and under.

STIs occur when viruses, bacteria or parasites are passed on through unprotected 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, and through breastfeeding.

STIs among young people often remain undiagnosed and untreated.

How to start a conversation about sexual health

Being on the same page as your partner(s) when it comes to having sex is important. You should talk with your partner(s) about whether they've:

- had a sexual health check recently and gotten the all clear or been treated
- practised safe sex, like using barrier protection such as a condom.

Being open with your partner(s) about your sexual health means you can enjoy the moment knowing you're both protected.

If you're not quite sure how to approach this subject with your partner, you can visit au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-talk-about-sexual-health

Healthcare professionals regularly speak about STIs and sexual health, so they are also well placed to speak with you about any questions you may have and can provide practical tips to help start a conversation. Your conversation with your healthcare professional will be confidential.

Always be prepared for safe sex – use protection

- Always use a condom or other barrier methods if you have vaginal, oral or anal sex.
- Using condom-safe lubricants (e.g. water or silicone based) can help stop condoms from breaking.
- Use a new condom every time you switch between oral, anal or vaginal sex, or between partners.
- Before any sexual activity, it's important you have your partner's consent, and that you give yours too. It's ok to say no if you are not in the mood or don't feel comfortable.
- PrEP is highly effective in preventing HIV infection - talk to your healthcare professional about whether it could be right for you. You can find more resources about PrEP at prepguidelines.com.au/patient-resources/

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- Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is a medication that can sometimes prevent HIV from infecting a person who has been exposed. It involves taking medication for 4 weeks after exposure and is best started within 72 hours (3 days) of exposure. Some healthcare professionals can provide PEP. Otherwise, PEP is available from the emergency department of most public hospitals and sexual health clinics.

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

What you need to know about STIs and pregnancy

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

Some key things to know:

- STIs like gonorrhoea and chlamydia can cause infertility if left untreated, but are easily diagnosed with an STI check and are treatable.
- Pregnancy won't prevent you from getting an STI. Talk to your healthcare professional about STI screening during pregnancy.
- If you do have an STI while you're pregnant, it could cause problems for you and your baby, particularly if it is not treated.
- If you are pregnant, or want to become pregnant, make sure your healthcare professional tests for STIs, including getting a blood test for syphilis.

Syphilis is on the rise – what it could mean for you and your baby

- Rates of syphilis in Australia have been rising, including rates of congenital syphilis.
- Untreated syphilis can result in brain infections, dementia, lung and heart failure, blindness and death.
- A pregnant person with untreated syphilis during pregnancy can pass it onto their unborn baby (known as congenital syphilis). This can cause

miscarriage, stillbirths, or the baby to die shortly after birth, or suffer permanent organ and brain damage.

- Syphilis is preventable and easily treatable.
- Because of its seriousness, all pregnant women are advised to get tested for syphilis.

Where can I get an STI test?

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

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.

Remember, most STIs are easily treated if caught early and can be cured. Other STIs, such as herpes and HIV, can't be cured, but they can be treated or managed effectively. Your healthcare professional will talk to you about the best treatment options for you.

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

Reach Out
au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-talk-about-sexual-health

PrEP Guidelines
prepguidelines.com.au/patient-resources/



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.

