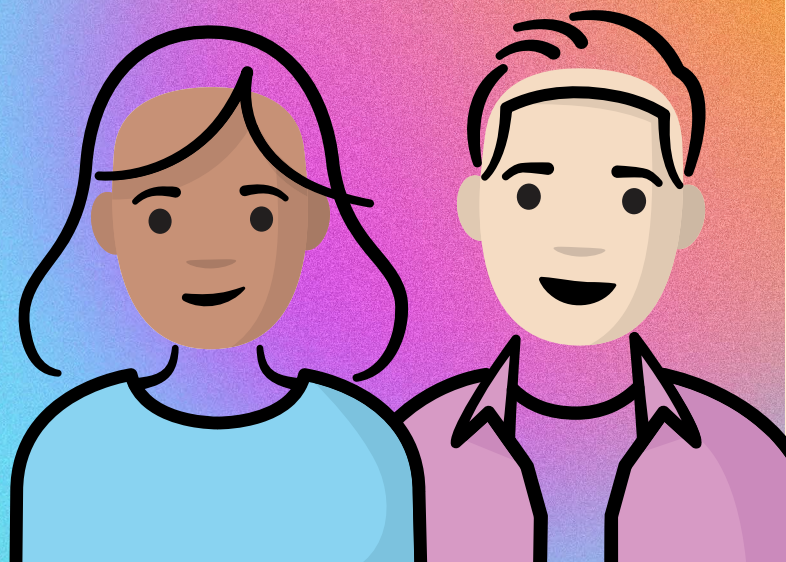




Australian Government

## Frequently asked questions about sexually transmissible infections



### What are sexually transmissible infections?

Sexually transmissible infections (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.

### Who can get an STI?

Anyone who is sexually active can get an STI regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation or relationship status. Many people who are infected don't have symptoms and could pass it on to others without realising. That's why testing and using protection are the most important ways we can stop the spread of STIs in Australia.

### What are the notifiable STIs in Australia?

Australia has four nationally notifiable STIs: syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, and donovanosis.<sup>1</sup>

These STIs are monitored nationally to provide data that helps to better understand and respond to trends, such as changes in the number of infections and people getting tested in different communities. This data only provides numbers for STIs that are reported – many STIs remain undetected, increasing the risk of transmission and potentially causing serious, long-term health impacts if left untreated.

### Are STIs common in Australia?

Despite progress in the management of STIs, they are still a public health problem in Australia. Cases of syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia have significantly increased since 2012, particularly in young people aged 34 years and under, who are more likely to contract these STIs than other age groups.

In 2022, notifications of infectious syphilis in Australia reached an historic high. A large number of these infections were among women of childbearing age, which has health implications for the risks of congenital syphilis and adverse pregnancy outcomes. While rates of HIV infection have been steadily decreasing, the transmission of HIV is still a concern.

<sup>1</sup> Donovanosis is close to being eliminated in Australia.

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### What is the most common STI in Australia?

Chlamydia is the most common STI in Australia, particularly among young people aged 15 to 29. Chlamydia does not cause visible symptoms in 85–90 per cent of cases.

### What are some common symptoms of STIs?

Symptoms vary depending on the type of STI, and many people who become infected do not have symptoms. Regular testing is the only way to know for sure if you have an STI.

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.

### Can you get STIs if you don't have sex?

Yes. Some STIs can be transmitted through intimate skin-to-skin contact or kissing, such as herpes, syphilis, mpox and HPV infection.

### Can you get STIs from oral sex?

Yes. Several STIs including syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, mpox, and genital herpes can be spread through oral sex.

### How can I prevent an STI?

There are a few ways you can protect yourself and others from getting an STI:

- Get tested regularly.
- Use a barrier contraceptive, such as a condom for protection.
- 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.
- Use a new condom for each person if sharing sex toys.
- Tell your partner(s) if you are diagnosed with an STI.
- Where appropriate, get vaccinated against the HPV and hepatitis B (HBV) infections.

### Do condoms protect you from all STIs?

No. Condoms don't protect the areas of your body that are not covered by the condom. Herpes, genital warts, syphilis and mpox can be spread from skin-to-skin contact.

However, condoms are very effective against many other STIs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea and HIV.

Regular testing and using condoms provides the best protection against all STIs.





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### Will taking the contraceptive pill protect me from getting STIs?

No. The contraceptive pill does not protect against STIs.

### Can an STI be passed from a pregnant woman to her baby?

Yes. Some STIs including syphilis can be transmitted to an unborn baby during pregnancy. Other STIs, like gonorrhoea, chlamydia, hepatitis B, and genital herpes, can be transmitted from the mother to the baby as the baby passes through the birth canal.

HIV, syphilis and herpes can be transmitted to infants during breastfeeding.

Gonorrhoea and chlamydia can also cause infertility if left untreated.

Pregnant people, or people looking to become pregnant, should discuss STI testing with their healthcare provider.

### How often should you get tested for STIs?

Regular sexual health check-ups are important because STIs often don't show symptoms.

People who are sexually active – even if they only have one partner – should get a regular STI test for syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhoea.

Men who have sex with men should also be tested for HIV as part of their annual sexual health check-up. Testing for STIs is recommended every three months for all men who have had any type of sex with another man in the previous three months.

You should also consider a sexual health check-up if your partner has recently had an STI or you have a new partner.

Your healthcare provider can provide you with advice about how often you should get tested.

### What happens during an STI test?

You can have a check-up at a local clinic or with your healthcare professional – without a referral.

Depending on what you are being tested for, you may be asked to give a blood or urine sample, or provide a throat, vaginal or anal swab, which you can usually do yourself. It's quick and easy. Test results usually come back within a week of your appointment and are kept confidential.

Results may be given over the phone, sent by text or you may be asked to make another appointment.

Because there are different types of STI tests, it's a good idea to discuss your situation with a healthcare professional. They can assess your risk and decide which tests you need.

### Who can see my test results?

In most cases the results of your STI test will be confidential, like other healthcare information collected about you. There are some exceptions, so if this is a concern for you, you should talk to your healthcare professional about it.

Information about your condition is not shared with your insurance company or your employer. You can also choose to hide particular records in your My Health Record data (the Australian Government's digital health record system). Hidden records are not available to any medical practitioners who are treating you.



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Positive cases for notifiable STIs are reported to public health authorities by your healthcare provider. However your information continues to be protected by privacy legislation, and any identifying information is removed before STI notifications are reported more widely.

### Where can you 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.

To find a healthcare provider in your area visit [health.gov.au/STI](http://health.gov.au/STI) and click on the [healthdirect service finder link](#).

### What is the cost of an STI test?

Although GP fees can vary, pathology tests are often bulk billed, so these may be free if you have a Medicare card. Sexual health clinics are often free and usually you can walk in without an appointment or referral.

### What happens if I test positive?

Your healthcare professional will notify you if your test results are positive and will discuss treatment options with you.

Most STIs are easily treatable if detected early, and usually curable.

You will be advised by your healthcare professional to contact your sexual partners to tell them you tested positive so they can get tested and treated too (online tools such as [letthemknow.org.au](http://letthemknow.org.au) or [bettertoknow.org.au](http://bettertoknow.org.au) can help you do this, and you can choose to remain anonymous).

Your healthcare professional will advise how long to wait after finishing treatment before having sex.

### How are STIs treated?

The most common STIs are treatable, typically with antibiotics or antivirals. Early detection and treatment is vital for managing all STIs and preventing serious health complications – this is why regular testing is so important, even if you don't have symptoms.

### Are there any STIs that can't be cured?

Although all STIs can be managed effectively, some are not curable. For example, gonorrhoea and chlamydia are both treatable and curable, whereas herpes and HIV are not curable, but they can be managed effectively with different medications. In many cases, there are treatments to help control the virus and help prevent symptoms and onward transmission to sexual partners.



Use protection and book a check-up today.  
Visit [health.gov.au/STI](http://health.gov.au/STI) for more information.

