




SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs)

Are you

positive

you're **negative?**

**WHAT YOU
NEED TO
KNOW**



saskatchewan
preventioninstitute
our goal is **healthy** children

1319 Colony Street
Saskatoon, SK S7N 2Z1
Bus. 306-651-4300
Fax. 306-651-4301
Email: info@skprevention.ca
www.skprevention.ca

In this booklet, the terms 'male' and 'female' are used to refer to sex-related biological features (internal and external anatomy), not to gender identity.

What are STIs?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections that can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites. STIs are usually spread through sexual contact. Some STIs are spread through blood-to-blood transfer.

Anyone can get an STI. STIs affect people of every age, race, religion, income level, and education level.

How are STIs spread?

STIs can be spread through:

- Unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (sex without a condom)
- Skin-to-skin contact with infected area
- Kissing an infected area
- Sharing sex toys
- Mother to child during pregnancy, labour, or after delivery through breastfeeding

Some infections, like HIV, can also be spread through blood (e.g., sharing needles and other substance use equipment, piercing and tattoo equipment).

STIs cannot be spread through:

- Hugging or holding hands
- Sharing food or drinks
- Public washrooms
- Swimming in public pools
- Sweat or tears

What are my chances of getting an STI?

High Risk

- Vaginal intercourse without a condom
- Anal intercourse without a condom

Low Risk

- Sex with a condom
- Oral sex with a condom or dental dam
- Mutual masturbation with a barrier (e.g., condom)

Safe

- Masturbation (alone)



STIs can be spread even
if there are no symptoms.



How to avoid getting STIs:

- Choose not to have sex
- Talk to your partner about lower-risk and safer options to have sex
- Avoid skin-to-skin contact of infected area without a barrier (e.g., condom, dental dam)
- If you choose to have sex, use a condom properly from start to finish


Using alcohol or drugs, which affect judgement and decision making, may lead to risky behaviours.

Reduce your risk of HIV and other blood-borne infections by not sharing needles and other substance use equipment.

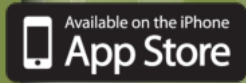
When to get tested:

- If you have unprotected sex
- If you have a new partner

STIs often have no symptoms. If you are sexually active, get tested every year. Even if no symptoms are present, the infection can still be passed to other people. Even if you have been treated for an STI in the past, you can still be re-infected (get the STI again). Make sure both you and your partner(s) are tested and treated.



If you are sexually active, get tested every year and after participating in high-risk behaviours.



KIS-SK

Testing can be performed by a family doctor, at a local medical clinic, at a public health office, or at a hospital. To find STI testing sites in Saskatchewan, use the “Keep It Safe Saskatchewan” mobile phone app ([KIS-SK](#)).

Learn About
Contraceptives

Learn About
STIs

Remember, most STIs can be cured and others can be controlled with medication. Testing and treatment are important for preventing long-term harm.

Helpful
Videos

Reminder
Calendar

STIs at a Glance

Sexually Transmitted Infection	Transmission			
	Unprotected Oral Sex	Unprotected Vaginal Sex	Unprotected Anal Sex	Skin-to-Skin Contact With Infected Area Without Barrier
Chlamydia	✓	✓	✓	
Genital Herpes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gonorrhea	✓	✓	✓	
Hepatitis B	✓	✓	✓	
Hepatitis C (HCV)	✓ (If exchange of blood)	✓ (If exchange of blood)	✓ (If exchange of blood)	
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)	✓	✓	✓	
Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Syphilis	✓	✓	✓	✓
Trichomoniasis		✓		

More detailed information on the following pages.

To Baby During Pregnancy and/or Delivery	Curable	Increases Risk of HIV Transmission
✓	✓	✓
✓		✓
✓	✓	✓
✓		✓
✓	✓	✓
✓		
✓		✓
✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓





Chlamydia

What is it?

Chlamydia is an STI caused by bacteria. It can infect the urethra (the tube that allows urine and semen to pass out of the body), cervix, rectum, throat, mouth, and eyes.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
- Females: vaginal discharge, vaginal bleeding between periods, abdominal pain, and/or pain when urinating
- Males: penile discharge, testicular pain, and/or pain when urinating

How is it spread?

- Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
- Without treatment, to baby during delivery

How do I get tested?

- A urine sample or swab of the infected area

Can it be cured?

- Yes, antibiotics are available.

What happens if chlamydia is not treated?

- Can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in females. PID can cause infertility (inability to have a baby), chronic pelvic pain, and ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy outside of uterus). Symptoms of PID can include foul-smelling discharge from the vagina, high-fever, or muscle aches.
- Males may experience swelling of the testicles, prostate, and scrotum; in rare cases may lead to infertility.
- Although rare, can cause Reiter's Syndrome; symptoms include rashes, sores, and arthritis-like joint pain.
- During pregnancy, there is a risk of miscarriage or preterm birth.
- A baby exposed to chlamydia during pregnancy and/or delivery may be born with low birth weight or develop eye or lung infections or pneumonia.



Genital Herpes

What is it?

Genital herpes is a viral infection caused by the herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) or type 2 (HSV-2). HSV-1 usually infects the mouth or lips but can also infect the genital area. HSV-2 usually infects the genital area. A person can be infected with both HSV-1 and HSV-2.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
- May develop small, painful, fluid-filled blisters and sores, along with a flu-like illness

How is it spread?

- Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
- Contact with infected area (blisters, sores)
- To baby during pregnancy and/or delivery

How do I get tested?

- A blood test or swab of blisters/sores during an outbreak

Can it be cured?

- No, virus remains in the body forever. Medication is available to reduce the severity and frequency of outbreaks.

What happens if genital herpes is not treated?

- Many people do not experience symptoms, and herpes does not have a major impact on their lives.
- It is best to talk to a healthcare provider about options for treatment. In people with suppressed immune systems, genital herpes can cause rare but serious complications such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain), and blindness.
- During pregnancy, genital herpes may cause miscarriage, preterm labour, or premature delivery. This is more likely with a new infection or an active outbreak.
- In rare cases, a baby exposed to a new infection or active outbreak of genital herpes during delivery may develop serious skin, eye, or mouth infections. This can result in serious infections that may lead to death. Early treatment can help reduce harm to the baby.



Gonorrhea

What is it?

Gonorrhea is an STI caused by bacteria. It can infect the urethra (the tube that allows urine and semen to pass out of the body), cervix, rectum, throat, mouth, and eyes.

Symptoms

- Most females do not develop symptoms, but most males do
- Females: vaginal discharge, vaginal bleeding between periods, abdominal pain, or pain when urinating
- Males: penile discharge, testicular pain, or pain when urinating

How is it spread?

- Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
- Skin-to-skin contact with infected area; sharing sex toys
- Without treatment, to baby during delivery

How do I get tested?

- Urine sample or swab of infected area

Can it be cured?

- Yes, antibiotics are available.

What happens if gonorrhoea is not treated?

- Can cause infertility (inability to have a baby) in both females and males.
- Can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in females. PID can cause infertility, chronic pelvic pain, and ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy outside of uterus). Symptoms of PID can include foul-smelling discharge from the vagina, high-fever, or muscle aches.
- In males, can cause testes infection.
- During pregnancy, there is a risk of miscarriage or preterm delivery.
- If a baby comes into contact with infected vaginal fluid during delivery, infection may occur. If infected, the baby may develop arthritis, meningitis (inflammation of the protective membrane that surrounds the brain and spinal cord), sepsis (infection of the blood stream), or a severe eye disease that if left untreated could lead to blindness.



Hepatitis B

What is it?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that causes inflammation of the liver.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
- May experience tiredness, stomach pain, aching of joints, loss of appetite, jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), fever, and/or strangely-coloured urine or stool

How is it spread?

- Contact with infected blood and body fluids, including semen, vaginal fluid, and saliva (although rare)
- In Canada, it is most often spread through unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex

Hepatitis B can also be spread by sharing needles or personal items like toothbrushes and razors.

- Without treatment, can be spread to baby during pregnancy; most commonly spread when newborn is exposed to infected blood during delivery

How do I get tested?

- Blood test

Can it be cured?

- No, but the majority of people will recover from the infection and not require treatment.
- If chronic, virus remains in the body forever. Medication is available to lower the viral load (the amount of virus in the blood). Lowering the viral load reduces the chance of passing the virus to others and protects the liver from damage.
- Hepatitis B vaccine is available in Canada.

What happens if hepatitis B is not treated?

- Chronic hepatitis B can cause cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver or liver cancer.
- Can cause infertility in males.
- Hepatitis B progresses faster and causes more liver-related problems in people who are also living with HIV.
- During pregnancy, there is a high risk of miscarriage. There is also an increased risk of preterm labour.
- A baby exposed to hepatitis B during pregnancy and/or delivery may develop jaundice and/or fever. Of those babies that contract the virus, the majority will develop chronic hepatitis B.





Learn the facts about how STIs
are spread. Protect yourself.



Hepatitis C (HCV)

What is it?

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a liver disease caused by a virus.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
- May experience loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), fatigue, fever, and/or strangely-coloured urine or stool

How is it spread?

- Unprotected sex where blood may be present (e.g., anal sex, rough sex, or sex during menstruation)
- To baby during pregnancy or delivery

HCV can also be spread by sharing needles or personal items like toothbrushes and razors.

Important: HCV can live outside the body for many days. This means that even dried blood can transmit the virus.

How do I get tested?

- Blood test

Can it be cured?

- Yes. Some people are able to clear the virus from their bodies in the first 6 months after infection. For those who still have HCV after this time, there is medication that can clear it from the body in the majority of people.
- Medication is also available to lower the viral load (the amount of virus in the blood). Lowering the viral load reduces the chance of passing the virus to others and protects the liver from damage. A baby exposed to low levels of HCV during pregnancy is less likely to become infected.

What happens if HCV is not treated?

- Chronic HCV can cause cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver or liver cancer.
- HCV progresses faster and causes more liver-related problems in people who are also living with HIV.
- A baby exposed to HCV during pregnancy and/or delivery may develop jaundice, fever, and/or vomiting.



HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

What is it?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. HIV is a virus that attacks a person's immune system. The immune system is the part of the body that helps keep us healthy.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
- Can develop flu-like symptoms, fever, rash, joint pains, and/or enlarged lymph nodes within 6 weeks of becoming infected

How is it spread?

- Through body fluids: blood, vaginal fluid, semen and pre-cum, anal fluid, and breast milk
- Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
- Without treatment, can be spread to baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding

HIV can also be spread through blood from sharing needles and other substance use equipment.

How do I get tested?

- Blood test

Can it be cured?

- No, the virus remains in the body forever. There are medications available to lower the viral load (amount of virus present in blood) to undetectable levels and reduce the damage caused by the virus. People who are on HIV medication and have undetectable viral loads cannot pass HIV to sexual partners.

What happens if HIV is not treated?

- Causes damage to the immune system, making it too weak to fight off infections. People who are not treated will eventually become sick with life-threatening infections and will be diagnosed with AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).
- Babies born infected with HIV may have poor growth or weight gain, fever, and may develop skin, chest, ear, or stomach infections. There may also be delays in physical, mental, and emotional development.

Having an STI increases the risk
of becoming infected with HIV.



Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

What is it?

Human papilloma virus (HPV) is a virus with many different strains. Some strains cause genital warts or can increase the risk for certain kinds of cancer.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
- May develop painless, flesh-coloured bumps/warts on the vulva, vagina, cervix, rectum, penis, or scrotum
- Bumps/warts may re-appear at different times

How is it spread?

- Unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex
- Skin-to-skin contact with infected area; sharing sex toys
- Important: can be spread even if warts are not visible
- Although rare, can be spread to baby during delivery

How do I get tested?

- Physical examination, pap test (for females)

Can it be cured?

- No. In most cases, HPV goes away on its own and does not cause any lasting health problems.
- There is no treatment for the virus, but there are treatments for the health problems HPV can cause (e.g., genital warts and associated cancers).
- HPV vaccine is available in Canada. It is recommended that all youth receive this vaccine before becoming sexually active, but the vaccine can be beneficial at any age.

What happens if HPV is not treated?

- If HPV does not go away on its own, it can cause health problems like genital warts and cancers.
- If infection is extensive in the birth canal during delivery, a Caesarian section may be recommended for delivery.
- Although rare, a baby exposed to HPV during delivery may develop genital HPV, oral HPV, or tumors that grow in the larynx. These disorders may cause respiratory tract complications for the infant or risk of cervical cancer for female infants when they grow up.



Syphilis

What is it?

Syphilis is an STI caused by bacteria. There are four different stages to the infection: primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary. Syphilis is most infectious during the first two stages and, if left untreated, causes the most harm during the final two stages.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
- Often called the “great imitator” because it mimics symptoms of other diseases
- Potential symptoms include one or more painless sores in the genital area; flu-like symptoms; hair loss; fever; headache; and/or a rash on palms, soles of feet, or body

How is it spread?

- Through contact with a syphilitic sore or rash in the genitals or mouth, including unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex; wet kissing; sharing sex toys
- Without treatment, to baby during pregnancy or delivery

How do I get tested?

- A blood test or a swab of infected area

Can it be cured?

- Yes, antibiotics are available. Early treatment is important. Treatment cannot undo any damage that has been done.

What happens if syphilis is not treated?

- Over time, can cause damage to the heart, liver, brain, or eyes, and in rare cases can cause death.
- During pregnancy, there is risk of miscarriage, premature birth, and low birth weight of newborn. Syphilis can be treated during pregnancy.
- A baby exposed to syphilis during pregnancy can develop congenital syphilis. Congenital syphilis can cause serious medical complications with the brain, eyes, ears, heart, skin, teeth, or bones, or may cause death.



Trichomoniasis (often called “Trich”)

What is it?

Trichomoniasis is an STI caused by a parasite. These parasites may infect the vagina, foreskin (if uncircumcised), urethra (the tube that allows urine and semen to pass out of the body), bladder, or cervix.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
- Females: foul-smelling vaginal discharge, pain during intercourse, and/or pain or burning when urinating
- Males: penile discharge and/or pain or burning when urinating

How is it spread?

- Unprotected vaginal sex (penis to vagina or vulva to vulva contact)
- Sharing sex toys

How do I get tested?

- A physical examination and swab of infected area

Can it be cured?

- Yes, antibiotics are available.

What happens if trichomoniasis is not treated?

- Can cause infertility (inability to have a baby) in both females and males.
- Can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in females. PID can cause infertility, chronic pelvic pain, and ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy outside of uterus). Symptoms of PID can include foul-smelling discharge from the vagina, high fever, or muscle aches.
- During pregnancy, there is risk of premature rupture of membranes, preterm birth, and low birth weight of newborn.



Effects of STIs on pregnancy and newborn babies

STIs do not only affect health today. They can also affect fertility (the ability to have a baby), future pregnancies, and newborn babies.

For example, certain STIs increase the risk of miscarriage, preterm labour and delivery, and/or birth defects. Newborns that have been exposed to STIs can have low birth weight, eye or lung infections, or more serious infections (e.g., meningitis). This is why it is important to be tested for STIs before and during pregnancy.

Treatment can greatly reduce the effects on the pregnancy and the newborn baby.

STI	Affects Fertility	Affects Pregnancy	Affects Newborn
Chlamydia	✓	✓	✓
Genital Herpes		✓	✓
Gonorrhea	✓	✓	✓
Hepatitis B	✓ (males)	✓	✓
HCV			✓
HIV	✓	✓	✓
HPV			✓
Syphilis		✓	✓
Trichomoniasis	✓	✓	✓



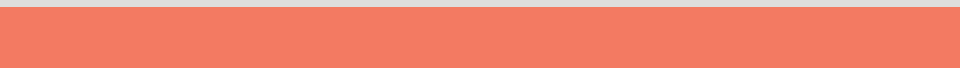
Other Conditions

The vagina has bacteria that helps it stay clean and healthy. Sometimes these bacteria can get out of balance, which may cause symptoms similar to STIs. If you are experiencing any discomfort, it is important to see a care provider for testing and treatment.

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

Bacterial vaginosis is caused by an imbalance of healthy bacteria in the vagina. It is **not an STI**, but unprotected sex with a new partner or multiple partners can increase the risk of BV. There is a higher risk of BV during pregnancy due to hormonal changes.

Symptoms

- Often no symptoms
 - Thin vaginal discharge that may be white, gray, greenish, or foamy
 - Fishy smell that becomes more noticeable after sex
 - Itching/burning feeling when urinating or around the vulva
- 

How is it spread?

- Occurs naturally
- Unprotected sex, sharing sex toys, douching, and using perfumed products and strong soaps can change vaginal pH and allow bacteria to grow
- Male partners will not require treatment, but female sex partners should get tested

How do I get tested?

- Swab of vaginal discharge

Can it be cured?

- Yes, antibiotics are available.
- Do not have sex until you finish treatment.

What happens if BV is not treated?

- Higher risk of getting STIs.
- BV can cause pregnancy problems, including premature birth or low birth weight of newborn.

Yeast Infection

Vaginal yeast infections are caused by an overgrowth of the fungus *candida*. It is **not an STI** because it can occur without having sex.

Symptoms

- Itchiness in and around the vagina
- Burning, redness, and swelling of the vagina and vulva
- Pain when urinating or during sex
- Thick, white, vaginal discharge that does not have a bad smell

How is it spread?

- Occurs naturally
- Vaginal, anal, oral sex; sharing sex toys

How do I get tested?

- Pelvic exam to look for swelling and discharge
- Swab of vaginal discharge

Can it be cured?

- Yes. Antifungal medicines are available without prescription, but it is recommended that a full test for STIs be done to rule out other potential causes.
- Pregnant people should not take oral antifungal medications, which have been linked to birth defects and increased risk of miscarriage.

What happens if yeast infection is not treated?

- Infection may get worse and may lead to other health problems such as skin infections and gastrointestinal problems.



For more information about STIs:

KIS-SK

KEEP IT SAFE SASKATCHEWAN



This smart phone app provides information to help you make healthy choices and informed decisions about your sexual health.

Download this app to:

- Find free contraceptives and STI testing sites in Saskatchewan
- Set reminders for taking contraceptives or booking health appointments
- Learn about contraceptives and STIs
- View helpful videos on using contraceptives

For more information about this app, go to:

<http://www.skprevention.ca/keep-it-safe-saskatchewan/>

or download it from the App Store or Google Play Store.

You can also visit:

CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment and Information Exchange)

This national organization shares information related to STIs, HIV prevention and treatment, and care and support for people living with and vulnerable to HIV.

www.catie.ca

Sex and U

This website is administered by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC), and has credible and up-to-date information on sexual health.

www.sexandu.ca

STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection Brochure

This brochure, created by the Public Health Agency of Canada, shares information on STI risks.

librarypdf.catie.ca/PDF/ATI-20000s/24801.pdf



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