

## How can people protect themselves from STIs?

Condoms used with water-based lubricant are still the best way to protect people from STIs, and can also prevent pregnancy. Condoms can be very effective if people store and use them correctly:

- Don't keep condoms in places that are too hot (such as in a car) or too cold (such as in a freezer). Keep condoms away from direct sunlight
- Choose and use the right size (width) condom – small (45-51mm), regular (52-56mm) or large (56-60mm). ECCQ has a free sample pack available with different sized condoms. Anyone can order free condom packs at [www.eccq.com.au/health](http://www.eccq.com.au/health) or ask our program staff.
- Always remember to:
  - ✓ Check the expiry date and don't use condoms that have expired
  - ✓ Always use water-based lubricant. Don't use oil-based lubricant as it can damage the condom
  - ✓ Don't re-use condoms – washed or not washed
  - ✓ Don't use two or more condoms at the same time
  - ✓ Condoms should be used for every type of sex- vaginal, anal and oral

Condoms and water-based lubricant can be bought from supermarkets, pharmacies and convenience stores.

**HPV vaccine can prevent genital warts and cancers of cervix, anus, vulva, vagina, penis and throat.**

The risk of getting an STI are reduced by:

- Using condoms
- Reducing the number of sexual partners
- Avoiding having sex with a person if they have a lump, rash or sore on their genitals. Suggest that they have a sexual health check
- Drinking alcohol in moderation. Drinking alcohol or taking drugs can make it difficult to make good decisions about having safe sex
- Having a sexual health check if you have had sex while traveling in another country
- Having a sexual health check when you have finished a relationship and before you start a new one
- Do not wash out your vagina with water or antiseptic solution after sex (this is called douching). Washing out the vagina does not protect against STIs and can make it easier to be infected



Please contact us at [www.eccq.com.au/health](http://www.eccq.com.au/health) or download a copy of the **Let's Talk About It** booklet from the website for further information. You can also ask us to send you hard copies for free.

Website: [www.eccq.com.au/health](http://www.eccq.com.au/health)

Phone: **07 3844 9166**

Fax: **07 3846 4453**

Email: [health@eccq.com.au](mailto:health@eccq.com.au)



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# Stay Safe & Protected

## Information about STIs



## What are STIs?

STIs are infections that can be passed from one person to another by sexual contact including **vaginal sex** (penis in vagina), **anal sex** (penis in anus) and **oral sex** (mouth to genitals/anus). Some STIs can also be passed from mother to baby or by blood contact such as HIV and hepatitis B. These are discussed separately in our HIV and Hepatitis B Factsheet available at [www.eccq.com.au/health](http://www.eccq.com.au/health).

There are more than 30 different STIs. Some can be caused by viruses, some by bacteria and some by parasites.

## What are common STIs in Australia?

The common STIs in Australia are Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, Genital Warts and Genital Herpes.



## How do STIs affect people?

Some STIs can cause serious long-term health problems if left untreated, such as pelvic inflammatory diseases (PID) for women or **infertility (cannot have a baby) for both men and women**. STIs can increase the risk of getting and transmitting HIV. Some STIs can even lead to death. **Therefore, it is important that STIs are diagnosed and treated early.** Recent and current sexual partners will also need testing and treatment if infected. Your doctor can help you to contact them if required. **This will help to prevent re-infection.**

## How can people know if they have an STI?

A sexual health check is the only way to know whether a person has an STI or not.

**Most people who have an STI look and feel healthy without knowing that they are infected.** However, some people may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Blisters, lumps, sores, a rash or a change in the skin on the genitals (penis, testicles, vagina, anus) or inner thighs
- Pain in the testicles (males)
- Lower belly pain, pain during or just after sex, or bleeding between periods (females)

- Unusual discharge or bleeding from the penis, vagina, or anus
- Pain or difficulty passing urine

**All people who are sexually active should have sexual health checks.** In particular, if you:

- change a sexual partner, particularly at the start or end of a sexual relationship
- have had sex without using a condom
- have more than one sexual partner

## What might a sexual health check include?

- Discussion of your sexual health concerns and taking a sexual health history
- Urine and/or blood tests
- Swabs of the genital, anus or throat

## Where can people get a sexual health check?

You can have free and confidential sexual health checks at sexual health clinics ([www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services/find-service)). You can also go to your GP or Family Planning Services.

Queensland residents aged 16 years or older can order a free and confidential chlamydia and gonorrhoea urine test online at [www.health.qld.gov.au/13health/webtest](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/13health/webtest). However it does not replace a sexual health check.

## How are STIs treated?

- Chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis are caused by bacteria and can be cured with antibiotics. However, people can be re-infected.
- Genital herpes and genital warts are caused by viruses and cannot be cured, but symptoms can be treated with oral, injected or cream medications.



## What will happen if a pregnant woman has an STI?

All pregnant women should have a sexual health check in early pregnancy. Some women may need to be tested for STIs a few times throughout the pregnancy. STIs like syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhoea and genital herpes can be passed from mother to baby during pregnancy or birth. Syphilis is very dangerous for babies and can cause birth defects or miscarriage. Most STIs can be safely treated during pregnancy – the earlier the better.