

# CLEAN UP ALL DOUBTS FOR LOVE

**A women's guide to STIs and good sexual health.**



## INTRODUCTION

This booklet aims to provide basic information on the common Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) that affect women, including those who are in a relationship or married. By knowing more about STIs and how to protect yourself, you can take charge and make informed choices when it comes to your sexual health.

This booklet should be used as a guide only. Remember, many STIs do NOT cause symptoms and if they do, symptoms may be mild. Get a check-up if you think that you have an STI, or if have not had a check-up before or in the past year. If you've ever had sex, it is possible that you may have been exposed to an STI; having an STI check-up can give you a clean bill of health.

## Acknowledgements

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### Disclaimer:

*We have attempted to provide full, accurate and up to date information in this booklet, based on current medical evidence and opinion. However, information and advice may vary from different sources, and over time. If you have any further questions, see your doctor or healthcare provider.*

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## WHAT ARE SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS?

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are infections which can be transmitted (passed from one person to another) through sexual intercourse or activity, or close body contact with another person who is infected with an STI. STIs can be caused by bacteria, viruses, protozoa or parasites.

BACTERIA	VIRUSES	PARASITES	PROTOZOA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chlamydia</li><li>• Gonorrhoea</li><li>• Syphilis</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HIV</li><li>• Herpes simplex virus (HSV-1 and HSV-2) – genital herpes</li><li>• Human papilloma virus (HPV) – genital warts</li><li>• Hepatitis B</li><li>• Molluscum contagiosum virus (MCV) – molluscum</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pubic lice (“crabs”)</li><li>• Scabies</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trichomonas</li></ul> <p>(Protozoa are single-cell organisms that can also cause disease like bacteria and viruses)</p>

Other common infections that are NOT considered STIs include thrush (fungal/yeast infection) and bacterial vaginosis (bacterial overgrowth).

*Please refer to the table on page 11 or the DSC website [www.dsc-clinic.sg](http://www.dsc-clinic.sg) for more detailed information on each STI.*

You can protect yourself against many STIs by using condoms and being vaccinated. In fact, most STIs can be treated or cured. Being diagnosed and treated early for STIs helps prevent future complications and keeps you healthy.

## HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE AN STI OR HIV?

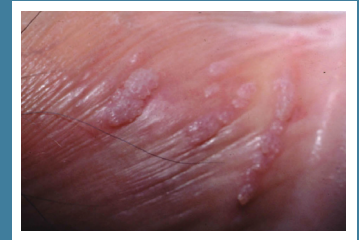
Most people with an STI, including HIV, have no symptoms. Often, you can only find out if you have an infection by getting tested.

Signs or symptoms may include:

- Unusual vaginal discharge (itchy, smelly, larger amounts than usual, abnormal colour);
- Abnormal bleeding such as during or after sex or between menses;
- Pain when passing urine or pelvic pain during sexual intercourse;
- Blisters, sores, or lumps on the vulva, opening of vagina or surrounding skin;
- Itchiness or rashes in the genital or anal area;
- Fever, swollen glands, flu-like illness, body rash or unexplained weight loss.



Lumps from molluscum. These are painless but can be itchy.



Warts on the penis. These can occur anywhere over the genital and anal area.

See your doctor if you have any symptoms, and avoid having sex until you have been tested. If you've engaged in any sexual activity, have a check-up even if you don't have symptoms.

## WHY SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR HIV?

Knowing that you are HIV negative means you know to continue safe sex practices and condom use to avoid becoming infected.

### KNOWING IF YOU HAVE HIV IS USEFUL BECAUSE:

- » You know to take care of your health and seek medical care.
- » You are able to start HIV treatment early before you become unwell, and stay healthy.
- » You are able to help protect sex partners from becoming infected by practicing safer sex and using condoms.
- » You are able to help prevent your baby from becoming infected by being on treatment through your pregnancy.
- » You are able to inform sex partners to get tested which can further help prevent HIV being transmitted.
- » You can advise future partners of the availability of HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) if you think you've exposed them to HIV. For more information on PEP, see page 17.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STIs AND HIV

### HAVING AN STI INCREASES THE CHANCES OF BEING INFECTED WITH HIV

If you are HIV negative, the inflammation caused by an STI (even when you do not have symptoms) increases your risk of getting HIV by making it easier for the virus to enter your body. If an ulcer (an open sore) is present, the risk is even greater.



Blisters on the penis from the early stage of genital herpes. These can occur anywhere over the genital and anal area.

### HAVING AN STI INCREASES THE CHANCES OF TRANSMITTING HIV

If you are HIV positive, having an STI may increase your HIV viral load and make it easier to transmit HIV to your sex partners.

### HAVING AN STI AND BEING HIV POSITIVE

If you are HIV positive and have an STI, not only is the risk of passing HIV to your sex partner higher, but the STI may be more severe or difficult to treat. If you are sexually active, make sure that you have regular sexual health checks.

## THE SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK-UP

During the sexual health check (or STI screen or STI testing), you will be asked questions about your sexual history. This is to assess your likelihood or risk of various STIs and HIV, and will help decide which tests are necessary. The information you provide is kept private and confidential so it is best to be honest with your doctor so that an accurate assessment can be made. A full STI check-up will usually include the below tests.

### THE ROUTINE STI CHECK-UP (No symptoms)

Physical examination looking for signs of STIs, and the following tests:

BLOOD TESTS	SWABS	URINE SAMPLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HIV</li> <li>• Syphilis</li> <li>• Hepatitis B* (if you have not been vaccinated or infected in the past)</li> </ul> <p><i>Other blood tests:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hepatitis A** (if your partner also has sex with men)</li> <li>• Hepatitis C# (if you have HIV or have ever injected recreational drugs)</li> <li>• HSV-1 and HSV-2 (may be considered depending on your symptoms and exposure)</li> </ul>	<p>Cervical swab (entrance of the neck of the uterus)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chlamydia</li> <li>• Gonorrhoea</li> </ul> <p>Vaginal swabs (may not be performed if you have no symptoms)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trichomonas</li> <li>• Bacterial vaginosis</li> <li>• Thrush</li> </ul> <p>Anal swab (if you have anal sex)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chlamydia</li> <li>• Gonorrhoea</li> </ul> <p>Throat swab (if you give oral sex and your partner has gonorrhoea in his penis)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gonorrhoea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chlamydia</li> <li>• Gonorrhoea</li> </ul> <p>A urine test for chlamydia and gonorrhoea may be offered instead of a cervical swab if you have no symptoms and are reluctant to be examined.</p>

\*If blood results show you are not immune to hepatitis B, vaccination is recommended to help protect you against this viral infection.

\*\*If your partner has sex with other men and you are not immune to hepatitis A, consider being vaccinated against hepatitis A which is a virus that infects the liver causing liver inflammation. It is more common as an STI in bisexual and men who have sex with men.

You can get hepatitis A by getting small amounts of infected faeces in your mouth (“oral-faecal transmission”).

#Hepatitis C is a virus that infects the liver. It is transmitted through the exchange of infected blood such as during injection of recreational drugs and transfusion of contaminated blood (all blood donations in Singapore are screened).

### THE STI CHECK-UP IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS

The tests from a routine check-up will be performed along with extra tests which may include:

- Ulcer swab
- Vaginal swabs if not already taken.

### THE PAP SMEAR

The Pap smear (or cervical cytology) is NOT a routine part of the STI check-up. Having a Pap smear also does not mean you are automatically getting tested for STIs.

A Pap smear is a test, in the form of a swab, taken from the cervix to detect cell changes that may turn into cancer (pre-cancer changes). These are often caused by Human papillomavirus (HPV). It can also detect cervical cancer early so that it is easier to cure. If you have ever had sexual contact, a routine Pap smear should be done at least every 3 years or according to current recommendations in Singapore. If you are HIV positive, a routine Pap smear is needed every year.

### THE STI CHECK-UP IF YOU ARE HIV POSITIVE

Getting regular blood tests to monitor your HIV infection does not mean that you are automatically getting tested for STIs. If you are sexually active ask your doctor to include a complete STI screen, as above, or arrange to have this done at a sexual health clinic, such as DSC Clinic.

### HOW OFTEN SHOULD I HAVE A SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK?

How frequently you should get tested for STIs depends on your sexual activity as well as your partner's. The greater number of sex partners that you have, or if your partner has other sex partners, the more often you should get tested. A good start may be once a year.

## I HAVE AN STI – WHAT ABOUT MY PARTNER?

### INFORM YOUR PARTNER IF YOU'VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH AN STI

If you're diagnosed with an STI, it is important to inform recent and previous sex partners so that they know to get tested and treated. This helps prevent the infection being transmitted to more people and reduces your chances of getting infected again.

By telling your partner you are protecting yourself as well as helping them look after their own health.

Your doctor can help you with how best to inform your partners.



Pubic lice. These can be seen with the naked eye.



Rash on the palms from secondary syphilis. The same rash can appear on the soles of the feet.

## PROTECTING YOURSELF AGAINST STIs AND HIV

### PRACTICE SAFER SEX

Safer sex means any sexual activity that doesn't allow sexual bodily fluids or blood to pass from one person to another. Condoms are the most effective way to prevent HIV transmission and also help prevent many other STIs. They work by preventing the transfer of infected fluids.

### LUBRICANTS ("LUBE")

Using lubricant helps reduce the chance of the condom breaking. Only use a water based lubricant. Oil and creams weaken condoms and can cause them to break. You may need to reapply lubricant on the condom or at the vaginal opening several times when having sex.

### POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEP)

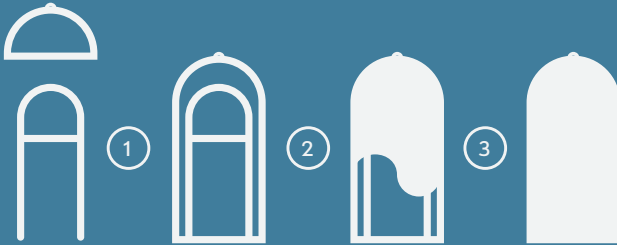
If you think you've been exposed to HIV such as through unprotected sex with someone who has HIV, there is a course of treatment called post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) that can help reduce the chances of you becoming infected. See page 19.

### STI CHECK-UPS AND VACCINATIONS

Regularly get tested for STIs. If you are in a new relationship, both you and your partner should have an STI check-up first. Get treated for and cleared of STIs and HIV before deciding to stop using condoms. Getting vaccinated early or if you're not immune may help prevent you catching certain infections (such as hepatitis B and HPV).

## USE CONDOMS CORRECTLY

Use condoms every time you have sex. Oral sex is considered low risk for HIV but some STIs can still be transmitted this way; you may wish to consider using condoms when giving oral sex as well.



**The condom should be on the penis before there is any penetration or penis to vagina contact. If you are putting the condom on your partner:**

- » Check that the condom hasn't passed its expiry date.
- » When opening the packet, take care not to tear the condom.
- » If your partner is not circumcised, pull back the foreskin before putting on the condom.
- » Squeeze the air out of the tip and roll the condom all the way down on the erect penis. If it does not roll easily, it may have been put on the penis inside out. Take the condom off and begin with a new one.
- » Apply plenty of water based lubricant on the outside of the condom and the vaginal opening (or anal opening if you have anal sex) before penetration.
- » After your partner ejaculates, hold the base of the condom when he pulls out so that it doesn't slip off. This should be done while the penis is still erect. If the penis becomes soft, the condom can slip off inside and allow semen to spill out.
- » Only use each condom once.
- » Dispose of the used condom in the bin, NOT the toilet.
- » Use only one condom at a time. Using 2 at once increases the chances of the condom breaking or slipping off.

## WOMEN AND VACCINATIONS

### WHAT ARE VACCINATIONS AND HOW DO THEY HELP?

Being vaccinated is a way of making you immune (protected) against particular virus infections. Vaccination makes your immune system produce its own protective antibodies that prevent you from becoming infected if you are later exposed to the virus.

### WHAT VACCINATIONS SHOULD I HAVE?

- Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended if you are not immune.
- Hepatitis A vaccination should be considered if you are not immune and your partner has or has had sex with other men or is bisexual.
- Both provide over 95% protection and generally last for life.

Schedule	1st Injection	2nd Injection	3rd Injection
Hepatitis B	Day 1	At 1 mth	At 6 mths
Hepatitis A	Day 1	At 6 – 12 mths	-

- HPV vaccination may be considered even if you are over 26 years of age but have had very few sex partners in your life. (In Singapore, only women aged 26 and under are currently recommended to have the HPV vaccination). The course consists of 3 injections given over 6 months.

**If you are HIV negative:** Once you've completed the vaccination course against hepatitis A or hepatitis B, further blood tests for these and booster injections are not necessary.

**If you are HIV positive:** Hepatitis B antibody levels should be checked every year and a booster dose given, if needed.

If you have another type of hepatitis (such as hepatitis C or liver disease from alcohol), get vaccinated against hepatitis A as well as hepatitis B.

STI	TRANSMISSION	COMMON SYMPTOMS	COMPLICATIONS	CAN IT BE CURED?	PREVENTION
Chlamydia • Bacteria • Common	Unprotected sex (vaginal and anal, rarely oral)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no symptoms.</li> <li>• Abnormal vaginal discharge, pain or bleeding with sex</li> </ul>	Pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, ectopic pregnancy, pregnancy complications, infected new-born baby.	Yes, with oral antibiotics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condoms</li> </ul>
Gonorrhoea • Bacteria • Common	Unprotected sex (vaginal, anal, and oral)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no symptoms</li> <li>• Abnormal vaginal discharge, pain or bleeding with sex</li> </ul>	Pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, ectopic pregnancy, spread into blood, joints & skin, pregnancy complications, infected new-born baby.	Yes, with an antibiotic injection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condoms</li> </ul>
Syphilis • Bacteria	Unprotected sex (all types), skin to skin contact with infectious rash/ulcer, mother to baby, contaminated blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no symptoms</li> <li>• Ulcer on the vulva, skin rash</li> <li>• Fever and swollen glands</li> </ul>	Deformity, disability, dementia and death from damage to skin, heart, brain or nerves, pregnancy complications, infected baby.	Yes, with antibiotic injections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condoms give some protection</li> </ul>
HIV • Virus	Unprotected sex (vaginal and anal, rarely oral), mother to baby, contaminated blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no symptoms until late</li> <li>• May have severe flu-like illness with new infection</li> </ul>	AIDS and death if untreated, rare cancers and infections, infected new-born baby.	No, but HIV treatment can control HIV and keep you healthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condoms</li> <li>• HIV treatment in pregnant women prevents infant infection</li> <li>*PEP</li> </ul>
Hepatitis B • Virus	Unprotected sex, mother to baby, contaminated blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no symptoms</li> <li>• Jaundice, fever, abdominal pain</li> </ul>	Liver failure, scarring and cancer, infected new-born baby.	No, but treatment can help control hepatitis B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vaccination</li> <li>• Condoms</li> </ul>
HPV (Warts) • Virus • Common	Sexual skin-to-skin contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no symptoms</li> <li>• Lumps on the genitals/anal area</li> </ul>	“High-risk types” of HPV associated with cervical cancer.	No, but it will usually resolve on its own. Treatment removes visible warts only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condoms give some protection</li> <li>• Vaccination</li> </ul>
HSV (Herpes) • Virus • Common	Sexual skin-to-skin contact, oral sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no symptoms</li> <li>• Painful blisters or sores</li> </ul>	Unable to pass urine, viral meningitis, infected new-born baby.	No, but treatment can control the symptoms and outbreaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condoms give some protection</li> </ul>
Molluscum • Virus • Common	Sexual skin-to-skin contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often no symptoms</li> <li>• Skin coloured lumps</li> </ul>		No, but usually resolves on its own. Treatment removes the lumps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condoms give some protection</li> </ul>
Pubic Lice • Parasite	Close or sexual body contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Itchiness in pubic area, lice and nits on pubic hair</li> </ul>		Yes, with special shampoos or lotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No real prevention</li> </ul>
Scabies • Parasite	Close or sexual body contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Itchy lumps or rash</li> </ul>		Yes, with special shampoos or lotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No real prevention</li> </ul>
Trichomonas • Protozoa	Unprotected sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have no symptoms</li> <li>• Abnormal vaginal discharge</li> <li>• Itchy or red vulva and vagina</li> </ul>	Pregnancy complications.	Yes, with oral antibiotics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condoms</li> </ul>
Bacterial vaginosis • Bacteria • Common	Not considered STI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have no symptoms</li> <li>• Fishy vaginal odour or abnormal discharge</li> </ul>	Pregnancy complications.	Yes, with oral antibiotics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid douching (cleaning inside vagina)</li> </ul>
Thrush • Fungus • Common	Not considered STI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May have no symptoms</li> <li>• Abnormal vaginal discharge</li> <li>• Itchy or red vulva and vagina</li> </ul>		Yes, with antifungal pessaries or oral anti-fungal medication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid unnecessary antibiotic use</li> </ul>



# HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV)

## WHAT IS HIV AND WHAT IS AIDS?

*Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)* is the virus that can lead to **Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)** if the HIV infection is not treated. Being infected with HIV is not the same as having AIDS. In fact, many people living with HIV nowadays are well and do not develop or have AIDS, because of the available treatments.

HIV weakens or damages part of the immune system that helps your body fight against infection and disease (including cancers). AIDS occurs when the immune system is so weakened that you develop illnesses that you would not normally have if your immune system was healthy.

## TRANSMISSION

HIV is transmitted through the transfer of sexual bodily fluids (semen, pre-cum and vaginal fluid), blood and breast milk, such as from:

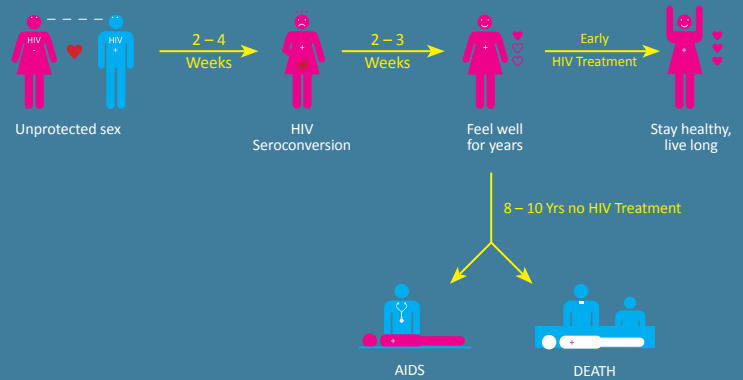
- Having unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person
- Mother-to-child during pregnancy, at birth or through breast-feeding (this can be almost completely prevented if the mother is on treatment)
- Transfusion with infected blood and blood products (blood donations in Singapore are screened)
- Sharing infected syringes and needles

If you are HIV negative but have an STI, the inflammation caused by the STI (even when you don't have symptoms) increases your risk of getting HIV by making it easier for the virus to enter your body.

If you are HIV positive, having an STI may increase your HIV viral load and makes it easier to transmit HIV to your sex partners.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Most people infected with HIV do not know that they have HIV. They look well and feel healthy until much later when the immune system is severely weakened or damaged. Symptoms may also occur in the early weeks after someone is first infected.



Some people, 2-4 weeks after becoming infected, experience a “seroconversion” illness (also known as primary HIV or acute retroviral syndrome) which causes a severe flu-like illness lasting 2-3 weeks. Symptoms may include fever, rash, sore throat and swollen glands.

Most people will then have no symptoms for many years. After 8-10 years without any HIV treatment, AIDS and other symptoms develop. These may include: weight loss, unexplained diarrhoea, recurrent rashes, fever or an AIDS-related illness (certain types of pneumonia, skin and other organ cancers, severe fungal infections, and infections of the brain).

Generally, you cannot tell if you have HIV based on how you feel or if someone else has HIV just by looking at them. A test is the only way to be sure.

## HOW DO I GET TESTED?

- |                      |                    |                         |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| • Routine Blood Test | • Rapid Blood Test | • Rapid Oral Fluid Test |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|

### Rapid HIV tests give same-day results.

When you are infected, your immune system produces antibodies to try to fight the HIV infection. It can take between 2 weeks and 3 months for antibodies to appear in the blood (newer tests can detect most HIV infections as early as 4 weeks). This is called the “**window period**”.



#### NEGATIVE HIV TEST RESULT

No antibodies were detected at the time of the test. You don't have HIV **OR** the test was taken too soon after exposure and antibodies haven't had a chance to develop. In this case, repeat the test 3 months after the sexual encounter.



#### POSTIVE HIV TEST RESULT

Antibodies were detected and you may be infected with HIV. It does not mean you have AIDS. Another blood test is taken to confirm that you have HIV. Counselling and support will be given and you will be referred to an HIV specialist.

Anonymous HIV testing, where no personal details are taken, is offered by some centres, such as Action For AIDS (AFA).

Other clinics for anonymous HIV testing:

**Anteh Dispensary** 368 Geylang Road, 389381, T: 67441809

**Cambridge Clinic** Blk 333, Kreta Ayer Road, #03-27, 080333, T: 63271252

**Dr Jay Medical Centre** 115 Killiney Road, 239553, T: 62355196

**Dr Soh Family Clinic** Blk 966, Jurong West Street 93, #01-221, 640966, T: 67917735M

**Lam Clinic** 739 Geylang Road, 389649, T: 67481949

**Dr Tan and Partners** 11 Unity Street, #02-07 Robertson Walk, 237995, T: 62387810

## TREATMENT

There is no vaccine or cure for HIV but there is treatment to control the virus and keep your immune system strong so that you stay healthy. Not everyone diagnosed with HIV needs to start treatment immediately. Your symptoms and blood test results will help decide when treatment should begin. Regular blood tests to monitor your immune system along with other blood tests will be performed as part of your HIV care.

Starting HIV treatment (called highly active anti-retroviral therapy, HAART) before your immune system is severely weakened will help prevent symptoms and AIDS-related conditions. HAART is a combination of at least 3 anti-HIV medications taken daily on a long-term basis. It suppresses the virus and prevents further damage to the immune system.

Most people living with HIV who start the correct treatment when they need to lead productive and healthy lives.

## OTHER INFORMATION ABOUT HIV

**Pregnant women:** Many women may not see themselves to be at risk of HIV, especially if they are not aware that their partners have HIV, or if their partner has other sex partners. If an HIV positive woman becomes pregnant, she can infect the baby during the pregnancy and afterwards through breastfeeding. This can be almost completely prevented if the mother knows that she is HIV positive and is on the correct HIV treatment during her pregnancy. This means that even if you are HIV positive, you can get pregnant and have a healthy HIV negative baby.

“**HIV superinfection**” is when an HIV positive person is infected with a different strain of HIV. This can happen through unprotected sex with another person who is HIV positive. It could mean more rapid progression of your HIV infection, or that treatment of HIV becomes less effective. If you are HIV positive, continue to use condoms and have safe sex to protect yourself as well as your sex partners, even if both of you have HIV.

## PREVENTION

Using condoms is the most effective way of preventing HIV transmission. Condoms also help prevent many other STIs. If you inject drugs, avoid sharing any equipment.

If you are HIV negative, giving oral sex (sucking your partner's penis) is considered low risk. Avoid giving oral sex or letting your partner ejaculate in your mouth if you have cuts or sores in your mouth or bleeding gums.

If you are HIV positive, avoid having sex during your menstrual period.

If you think you've been exposed to HIV, there is a course of treatment called PEP that can help reduce the chance of you becoming infected. See below:

### POST EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEP)

- PEP is a 4 week course of anti-HIV medication which may prevent HIV infection.
- **PEP needs to be started as soon as possible after exposure and within 72 hours, to be most effective.**
- If you are HIV positive and think you may have exposed another person to HIV, let them know about PEP.
- PEP is not given to everyone because of the high risk of side-effects and may cause future drug resistance if not taken properly. It will also not help if you've had multiple exposures over a period of time or continue to be exposed to HIV. Discuss with your doctor whether or not PEP is advisable in your situation.

*To get PEP or for advice about PEP, contact your doctor or DSC Clinic.*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **QUESTION:**

*My fiancé was diagnosed with gonorrhoea and is taking treatment now. I'm wondering if it's necessary for me to get checked too even if we have started having protected sex. I do not have any symptoms so far. Also, how does one get infected with gonorrhoea? From what I know we only have intercourse with each other and both have not had any other partners before. I'm wondering how he got infected by it and how to prevent it in future.*

### **ANSWER:**

Gonorrhoea is a curable bacterial STI. It is transmitted by sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal or oral sex) with an infected person. There are often no symptoms in women so it is important for you to have a check-up and to receive treatment as well. It is possible that you may have been exposed to gonorrhoea before you started having protected sex. You may wish to make an appointment at DSC Clinic or your own doctor and abstain from sex until you've been tested and treated. Gonorrhoea can be prevented by always using condoms.

### **QUESTION:**

*I was getting some vaginal discharge and went for a check-up with my doctor. The result came back showing that I have chlamydia and I am now being treated. I am worried because I have only ever had a sexual relationship with my husband and don't want to pass it to him. He says he doesn't have symptoms. How did I get it? Is it because I'm not cleaning properly?*

### **ANSWER:**

Chlamydia is transmitted by having sexual intercourse (vaginal, anal and rarely, oral sex) with someone who is infected, and is one of the more common STIs diagnosed in Singapore. It is not picked up because of poor hygiene or from toilet seats. If you've been diagnosed with chlamydia, it's likely that your partner also has chlamydia and needs to be tested and treated as well to

prevent you from being re-infected. It often has no symptoms in men, so even if he feels normal, he still should see a doctor. It is advisable to be tested for other STIs including HIV to ensure that you haven't been infected with another infection, most of which can be cured. Condoms provide the best protection against chlamydia and other STIs/HIV, so until the both of you have been cleared of any STI or HIV, abstaining from sex or protected sex is advised.

### **QUESTION:**

*I am very worried and scared. I recently found out from a friend that my husband sees sex workers. He says that he stopped this a few months ago and always used condoms but I don't know if he is telling the truth. I do not have symptoms so cannot tell if I have been infected. We stopped sexual intercourse when I found out that he was doing 6 weeks ago but we were not having protected sex before that. What is my risk for STIs and HIV? What symptoms would I have?*

### **ANSWER:**

Most women with an STI or HIV do not have symptoms. The only way to be sure is to get tested. Any unprotected sex with an infected person can be a risk for STIs and HIV. An STI check-up now for gonorrhoea and chlamydia will be accurate (the incubation for gonorrhoea and chlamydia is 1-2 weeks). A blood test for HIV 4 weeks after your last sexual contact may be able to show if you have been infected. It is advisable to have another blood test at 3 months for syphilis and hepatitis B if you haven't already been vaccinated for hepatitis B, and get vaccinated if you are negative) and to repeat the HIV test. Ideally, your husband should also have a check-up and avoid sex (abstain) until both of you are treated for and cleared of any STI. Condoms offer the best protection against STIs and HIV so have protected sex with your partner or abstain if you are concerned that he may have an infection.

# STAY HEALTHY; GO FOR REGULAR CHECK-UPS AND GET VACCINATED.

## Key Messages To Remember

- Most STIs and HIV have no symptoms; get tested regularly.
- If you're worried that you or your partner has an STI or HIV, get tested regularly and try to use condoms.
- Protect your health; get vaccinated against hepatitis B and HPV.
- Having an STI increases your chance of getting HIV or passing on HIV; get tested regularly and consider using condoms.

## USEFUL CONTACTS AND LINKS

### DSC Clinic

*Outpatient clinic for STI/HIV, screening, diagnosis and treatment.*

**31 Kelantan Lane  
Singapore 200031  
T: 6293 9648  
[www.dsc-clinic.sg](http://www.dsc-clinic.sg)**

### Women's only clinic hours:

Wednesday 8-11am and 1.00pm-4.00pm  
Thursday 1.00pm-4.00pm  
Friday 1.00pm-4.00pm

### General clinic hours:

Monday – Friday 8.00am-11.00am and 1.00pm-4.00pm (Monday and Friday to 6.30pm)  
Closed Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays.

### Action for AIDS (AFA)

*Volunteer organisation providing support, education and assistance to people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as anonymous HIV and syphilis testing.*

**35 Kelantan Lane  
Singapore 208652  
T: 6254 0212  
[www.afa.org.sg](http://www.afa.org.sg)**

### Anonymous testing:

Tuesday and Wednesday 6.30pm-8.15pm  
Saturday 1.30pm-3.15pm

### HPB Online

*Singapore Health Promotion Board's website containing information about sexual health and STIs.*

**[www.hpb.gov.sg/sexualhealth/default.aspx?id=4590](http://www.hpb.gov.sg/sexualhealth/default.aspx?id=4590)**

### NAM

*Portal for people living with HIV and AIDS providing accurate and up-to-date HIV/AIDS information.*

**[www.aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com)**

### Counselling and Care Centre

*Non-government, non-profit group offering counselling services.*

**536 Upper Cross Street #05-241,  
Hong Lim Complex  
Singapore 050536  
T: 6536 6366  
[www.counsel.org.sg](http://www.counsel.org.sg)**

### Samaritans of Singapore

*Non-profit and non-religious organisation which providing 24-hour confidential emotional support to people in crisis, thinking of suicide or affected by suicide.*

**10 Cantonment Close #01-01  
Singapore 080010  
T: 1800 221 4444  
[www.samaritans.org.sg](http://www.samaritans.org.sg)**

### Positive Living Centre (run by AFA)

*A safe and supportive place for people living with HIV to meet and to learn to live positive lives. It provides training, counseling, support group activities and empowerment workshops.*

**Contact Norani for details.**

**E: [norani@afa.org.sg](mailto:norani@afa.org.sg) T: 62970336  
[www.afa.org.sg/support.php#plc](http://www.afa.org.sg/support.php#plc)**

Project by:

***DSC Clinic***

31 Kelantan Lane Singapore 200031

Call 6293 9648 for appointment

[www.dsc-clinic.sg](http://www.dsc-clinic.sg)

## I HAVE AN STI – WHAT ABOUT MY PARTNER?

### INFORM YOUR PARTNER IF YOU'VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH AN STI

If you're diagnosed with an STI, it is important to inform recent and previous sex partners so that they know to get tested and treated. This helps prevent the infection being transmitted to more people and reduces your chances of getting infected again.

By telling your partner you are protecting yourself as well as helping them look after their own health.

Your healthcare provider can help you with how best to inform your partners.



Pubic lice. These can be seen with the naked eye.



Rash on the palms from secondary syphilis. The same rash can appear on the soles of the feet.

## HOW TO START USING CONDOMS

It may not be easy to ask your husband or boyfriend to start using condoms when you've been together for many years or have not used condoms before. It can cause concerns about trust and faithfulness. If you have found out or are worried that your partner has an STI or has had sex with someone else, there are things that you can do to look after your health. Get tested regularly and get vaccinated. Using condoms is the other way to protect your health. Here are some tips on how you may introduce condom use to your partner:

**Be the one to bring up condom use.** Wear something sexy; suggest to your husband or boyfriend, *"Let's do something different/fun tonight"*. Arouse him with foreplay. Even have a selection of different types of condoms to make things interesting and playful (flavoured, ribbed, coloured etc).

**Speak calmly.** He may refuse at first, be upset, angry or even accuse you of being unfaithful, but you can explain to him the reasons why. Some suggestions are listed below. Many may even avoid the issue of mistrust. Practice explaining the reason so that you feel confident and practice putting on a condom properly (the staff at DSC can also help you with this). It may take time and many tries before he agrees. Let him know you are serious about your health and condom use; be insistent and persuasive.

**You can use pregnancy prevention as a reason.** Whatever your age, if you menstruate there is still a chance of accidentally getting pregnant EVEN when using the "withdrawal method" (he pulls his penis out to ejaculate):

*"I don't want to fall pregnant at this age."*

*"It's too expensive for us to have another child."*

*"It's too expensive for me to have an abortion."*

*"Pregnancy (or abortion) is more dangerous at my age."*

If you want to have children later on, you can use protecting your fertility or contraception as a reason:

*"I want to keep my body fertile by not getting any STIs."*

*"I want to get pregnant when the time is right/when I'm ready."*

*"The other methods of preventing pregnancy give me side-effects."*

*Condoms are the safest for me."*

If you've been diagnosed with an STI (even if you think he gave it to you): start with a general topic on health first and then STIs; ask what he thinks. Have the discussion when the atmosphere is relaxed, for example while taking a leisurely walk.

*"Let's start using condoms."*

*"I want to help keep you healthy."*

*"I want to prevent you from getting an infection."*

If he's been diagnosed with an STI:

*"I still love you, so I must stay healthy to look after the family/children."*

*"I need to protect my health."*

*"I want to be sure that the infection is cured."*

**Refuse sex if he refuses to use a condom.** Resist his sexual advances, ignore him, play cool and keep saying "no" until he agrees to use condoms. Insist that he gets tested and that he uses condoms if he continues to have sex with others. If he won't, do not have sex with him until he agrees to.

**Remember, you have rights in the relationship.** It is your right to talk about things that worry you. It is your right to refuse sex. It is your right to look after yourself and to stay healthy.