

How can I protect myself from STIs?

- Educate yourself on STIs so that you know when to seek medical advice.
- Sexual abstinence is the most reliable way to avoid infection.
- Be in a monogamous relationship or try to reduce your number of sex partners.
- Use condoms correctly and consistently.
- Vaccinate for STIs where vaccines are available e.g. hepatitis B virus and human papillomavirus (HPV). Speak to your healthcare provider for more information.
- Know your status by consulting your healthcare provider and getting tested for STIs. Encourage your partner as well.



References

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2. World Health Organization. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) [Internet]. Who.int. World Health Organization: WHO; 2023. Available from: [http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-\(stis\)](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-(stis))
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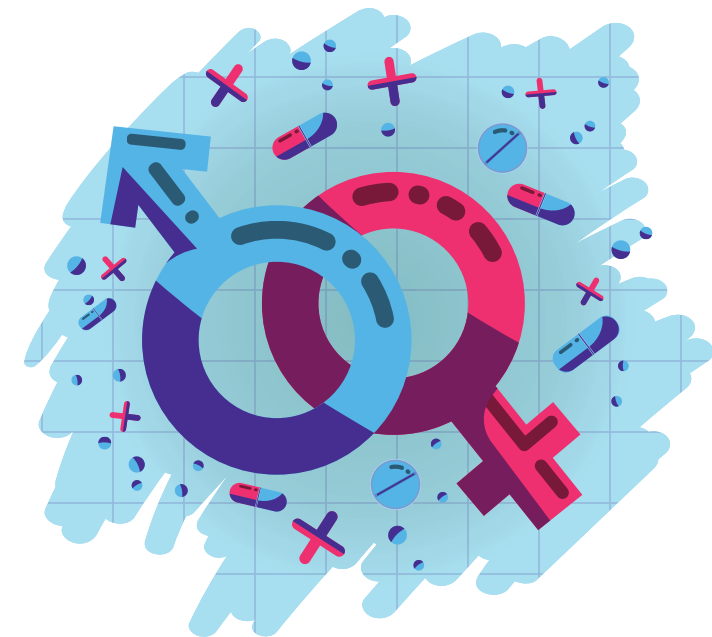
Contact Details

| | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Bethlehem | T 058 303 4961 |
| Bloemfontein | T 051 401 4650 |
| Cape Town | T 021 596 3400 |
| East London | T 043 701 5900 |
| George | T 044 803 8200 |
| Hermanus | T 028 313 0750 |
| Jeffreys Bay | T 042 293 4125 |
| Kimberley | T 053 830 8960 |
| Klerksdorp | T 018 468 9000 |
| Kroonstad | T 056 213 2076 |
| Maseru | T 002 663 24039 |
| Mossel Bay | T 044 691 1399 |
| Paarl | T 021 872 5158 |
| Port Elizabeth | T 041 391 5700 |
| Potchefstroom | T 018 293 0573 |
| Richards Bay | T 035 772 2201 |
| Somerset West | T 021 852 3144 |
| Springbok | T 027 712 1992 |
| Stellenbosch | T 021 887 6817 |
| Swellendam | T 028 514 1775 |
| Umhlanga | T 031 566 0099 |
| Upington | T 054 332 2653 |
| Vanderbijlpark | T 016 981 9898 |
| Vereeniging | T 016 440 6300 |
| Vredenburg | T 022 713 2103 |
| Vredendal | T 027 213 3663 |
| Welkom | T 057 391 0400 |
| Worcester | T 023 347 1021 |
| Windhoek | T 061 431 3000 |

clients@pathcare.co.za
www.pathcare.co.za

“Pathology that Adds Value”

Compiled by: Dr Sabeedah Vawda
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Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are spread mainly by unprotected sexual contact, including vaginal, anal and oral sex. STIs can also spread through infected blood or blood products and can be transmitted from mother-to-child during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding.

What causes a STI?

There are more than 30 different bacteria, viruses and parasites known to cause STIs. Of these, 8 are associated with the highest incidence of STIs:

| CURABLE | CURRENTLY INCURABLE |
|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Syphilis | Hepatitis B virus |
| Gonorrhoea | Herpes simplex virus |
| Chlamydia | Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) |
| Trichomoniasis | Human papillomavirus (HPV) |

Outbreaks of new infections such as monkeypox are also recognised as STIs.

Where do STIs occur?

STIs occur worldwide. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 1 million STIs are acquired every day, worldwide. Sub-Saharan Africa is known to have high numbers of cases.

Who does STIs affect?

STIs can affect anyone, males and females. Adolescent girls and young women, pregnant women, people living with HIV, and other vulnerable populations such as transgender, gender diverse, and commercial sex workers, are exceedingly affected.

What are the symptoms of STIs?

- Most STIs cause no symptoms, therefore a person may be infected without knowing it.
- When symptoms are present, STIs can cause infections of the urinary tract and genital organs. These include:
 - o Urethritis – burning, painful urination with increased urge to urinate or a discharge.
 - o Cervicitis – pelvic pain, discharge, abnormal bleeding and pain during intercourse.
 - o Vaginitis – itching, discharge, painful urination and pain during intercourse.
 - o Genital ulcers – one or more open wounds on the genital organs that may or may not be painful.
- STIs may also infect the rectum, anus and pharynx.

What are the complications of STIs?

- Can cause both short-term and long-term complications:
 - o Pelvic inflammatory disease - infection of upper reproductive organs, including uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries, causing pelvic pain, fever and vaginal discharge.
 - o Arthritis – inflammation of joints causing pain and stiffness.
 - o Encephalitis – inflammation of brain, causing fever, headaches and in severe cases, confusion, seizures (fits) and weakness.
- High risk of ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus) and tubal-factor infertility.
- Can cause stillbirth and other poor pregnancy outcomes.
- May increase risk of acquiring or spreading HIV.
- Certain STIs are now resistant to treatment

How are STIs diagnosed?

If you are sexually active, talk to your health care provider about your risk for STIs. This is important since STIs may cause no symptoms. The health care provider will take a history, do an examination, and decide on the need for laboratory testing. Early detection and management will prevent a worsening infection and complications.

Laboratory diagnosis of STIs may involve testing a:

- Urine sample and/or a genital swab (vagina, cervix, anus or rectum).
- Swab of a genital sore.
- Throat swab or blood test in some cases.

How are STIs treated?

Medications are available to treat STIs caused by bacteria and parasites. Medicines are currently unable to cure viral STIs but will help to control the symptoms and lower the risk of spreading the virus.

