



STIs

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

WHAT ARE SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs)?

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are infectious diseases caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites and transmitted mainly through sexual intercourse.

Intercourse may be vaginal, anal or oral, and for some diseases transmission may involve close skin-to-skin contact or contact with blood and/or its derivatives. STIs affect all sexually active people, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, and the likelihood of exposure increases with frequent change of partners or the adoption of unprotected sexual practices.

THE MOST COMMON STIs ARE:

- HIV
- HEPATITIS B AND C
- SYPHILLIS
- CHLAMYDIA
- GENITAL HERPES
- HPV WARTS
- TRICHOMONADES
- GONORRHEA/MUCORRHEA
- SCABIES
- PEDICULOSIS

SYMPTOMS

STIs do not always cause symptoms or cause mild symptomatology which delays their diagnosis. Each disease may have common or different symptoms, which is why they are sometimes not easy to diagnose except by laboratory tests.

The main common symptoms that are characteristic of STIs are:

- Unusual/voluminous discharge of fluid from the vagina/perineum or anus (pus, mucus).
- Itching.
- Rashes or sores in the genital area.
- Pain or burning during sexual intercourse or urination.
- Presence of small nodules/tumours (warts) in the genital area.

DIAGNOSIS AND TESTS

Tests to diagnose STIs may include:

For persons with female reproductive organs, Pap test (Pap test), complete gynecological examination, culture of vaginal, urethral or perianal swab, colposcopy, HPV DNA Test, blood tests for HIV, Hepatitis and Syphilis, and molecular techniques (PCR) for Chlamydia.

For persons with male reproductive organs, clinical examination by a dermatologist-urologist, urethral or perianal swab culture, blood tests for HIV, Hepatitis and Syphilis, and molecular techniques (PCR) for Chlamydia.

If necessary, the doctor may suggest other more specialized tests on a case-by-case basis.

Delay in diagnosing an STI increases the risk of transmission to the sexual partner and delay in starting appropriate treatment can lead to significant complications such as infertility, dysfunction of affected organs, or even malignancy in some cases.

If you are diagnosed with an STI you must inform your partner(s) so that they can undergo appropriate diagnostic testing and treatment in case they have been exposed.



PREVENTION

Taking care of your sexual health is of paramount importance in preventing STIs.

Education and awareness

Learn about STIs, their symptoms and modes of transmission. Stay informed about safe sexual practices.

Safe sex practices

Proper and consistent condom use is one of the most effective methods of preventing STIs. Always use a condom during sexual intercourse.

Remember to check the expiry date and use a new condom for every sexual intercourse.

Use water-based lubricant for anal intercourse, and avoid using chemicals such as petrolatum that corrode the condom and increase the chances of it breaking.

Do not buy condoms that are not stored properly (shady place, room temperature), or are exposed to high temperatures or the sun.

REGULAR EXAMINATION

Regular testing for STIs is vital, especially if you are sexually active with multiple partners, have recently changed sexual partners, or your partner has been diagnosed with an STI.

Consult a health care professional to determine the appropriate frequency of testing based on your sexual activity.

VACCINATIONS

Some STIs, such as human papillomavirus (HPV) and Hepatitis B, can be prevented through vaccinations.

Check with your healthcare provider about recommended vaccinations.

OPEN COMMUNICATION

Establish open and honest communication with your sexual partners about sexual health.

Discuss each other's STI status and sexual history before engaging in sexual activities. This helps to make informed decisions and reduce the risk of transmission.

AVOIDING HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOURS

Certain behaviours increase the risk of STI infection. Avoiding sharing needles or syringes can lead to blood-borne infections.

Avoid drug use and excessive alcohol consumption as they can affect judgment and increase risky sexual behavior.



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