



BE SAFE: Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections



Did you know there are practical steps you can take to be safe? It is important to be safe and protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Read below to learn more about how to be safe.

What are STIs?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are viral and bacterial infections that can be spread from one person to another through sexual contact. You can get STIs from any sexual activity, whether it involves the mouth, anus, vagina, or penis. STIs are the same as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Even though most STIs respond well to treatment, some can be treated but not cured.

How do I prevent STIs?

- STIs can be passed from person to person during sex. If you are sexually active, use a latex condom every time you have sex (vaginal, anal, or oral). If you are allergic to latex, there are condoms made of non-latex rubber that you can use. However, lambskin condoms will **not** protect you from STIs.
- You can reduce your risk by decreasing your number of sexual partners.
- You can reduce your risk of developing STIs by having sex with only one person who only has sex with you, as long as both of you are not infected with an STI.
- You can protect yourself from STIs by abstaining from sex.

I'm pregnant. Can my baby be harmed by STIs?

- STIs can also be passed from a pregnant woman to her baby before or during the baby's birth. If you are pregnant, talk to your health care provider about getting tested and how to avoid passing infection to your baby.
- If you are infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) talk to your health care provider about whether breast feeding is safe for your baby.

What are the symptoms of STIs?

- Many STIs do not have symptoms. This means you can have an STI without knowing it. If you think you may have an STI or have been exposed, talk to your health care provider.

A Better Way to
LIVE

*Talk with your
health care team
about your goals.*



Why should I get tested for an STI?

- STIs can cause severe organ damage and infertility. Infertility can happen to a man or a woman, leading to the woman not being able to get pregnant. Many STIs show few or no symptoms, especially in women. You could have an STI and pass it to someone else and not know it. Having one STI can increase your risk for getting other STIs. If you are concerned, get checked for STIs. Don't risk giving the infection to someone else.

How do I get checked for an STI?

- Talk to your health care provider or call your local health department. They can help you get the tests you need.

How are STIs treated?

- Some STIs can be cured with antibiotics if they are treated early. Untreated STIs can cause serious health problems, such as infertility.
- If you are treated for an STI, your sex partner(s) should also be treated to prevent re-infecting you.
- Some STIs cannot be cured, but treating them can improve your health. It is important to talk to your health care provider if you think you might have an STI.

FOR THE MOST CURRENT INFORMATION AND OTHER RESOURCES:

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention: www.prevention.va.gov. Go to the *Healthy Living* tab and choose "Be Safe"
- Veterans Health Library: www.veteranshealthlibrary.org, search "infectious diseases"
- Clinical Public Health Program: HIV/AIDS: www.hiv.va.gov

If you have questions about how to make healthy living changes, please talk with your health care team.