

What are Sexually Transmitted Infections?



A sexually transmitted infection (STI) is caused by an infection that is passed on from person-to-person through unprotected sex. STI's can be passed on through vaginal, oral, anal sex, skin-to-skin contact as well as sharing sex toys. Symptoms of a sexually transmitted infection can range from unusual discharge, rash, soreness, pain when having sex or any obvious lumps and bumps.

Most sexually transmitted infections can be treated, however without treatment they can lead to long-term health problems. The best way to protect yourself from catching an STI is to wear a condom or dam everytime you have oral sex or sexual intercourse.

With this in mind, let's have a look at some of the most common STI's, the symptoms of a sexually transmitted infection and the treatment behind it.

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is a bacterial infection known as Chlamydia trachomatis. Chlamydia lives either in the uterus, the cervix, the urethra (the tube where urine comes out), the rectum and occasionally in the eyes and throat. If left untreated, it can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease, inflammation of the testicles or infertility.

Symptoms: Pain when passing urine, discharge from the tip of the penis, pain and swelling of the testicles, unusual discharge, spotting or bleeding after sex or between periods and , abdominal pain.

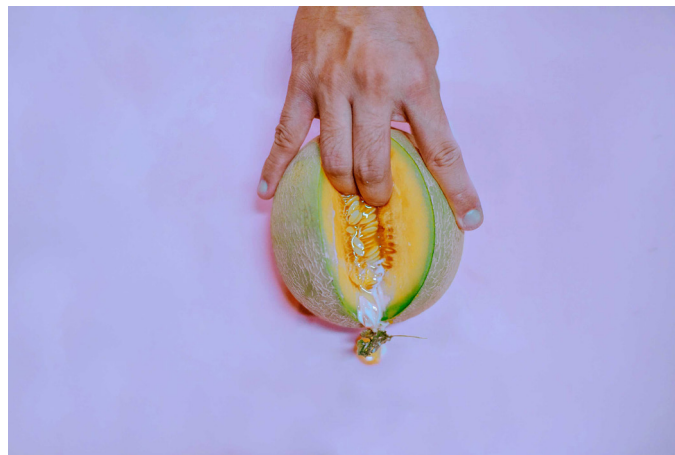
How it's treated: Antibiotics, either as a single dose or a longer dose up to two weeks.

Gonorrhoea

Used to be known as 'the clap', gonorrhoea is caused by a bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. Around half of women and 1 in 10 men won't have any signs of gonorrhoea but if you do get symptoms, they tend to happen within 14 days of being exposed to the infection but they can occur many months later.

Symptoms: Thin, watery, green or yellow discharge coming from the vaginal or the tip of the penis, pain when passing urine, lower abdominal pain or tenderness.

How it's treated: With two types of antibiotics, usually given as an injection and a single dose of tablet.



Syphilis

Syphilis is caused by a bacteria called *Treponema pallidum* that causes infected sores, blisters or ulcers on your genitals, anus or mouth. The infection can develop in three separate stages - early (primary and secondary syphilis), latent and the late stage so it can sometimes be hard to recognise the symptoms of this infection.

Symptoms: sores or ulcers on the penis, vagina, anus as well as the mouth. A blotchy red rash on the palms of your hands or soles of the feet, small skin growths on the vulva (in women) or around the anus (both men and women), white patches in the mouth, tiredness, headaches, joint pain, a fever and swollen glands in your neck, groin or armpits.

How it's treated: Antibiotics, either a single injection, a course of injections or tablets.

Genital Herpes

Genital herpes is caused by one of the herpes complex viruses (there are two). Herpes complex virus is very common and most people with genital herpes won't even know that they have the virus. Symptoms tend to appear between 2-14 days of being exposed to the virus but it can stay dormant in your body for weeks, months and even years. Even though the symptoms disappear, the virus will stay in your body and further outbreaks may appear at a later date.

Symptoms: Small blisters that burst to leave red, open sores on your vagina, penis, anus and throat, pain when urinating, tingling or burning of the genitals, flu-like symptoms and unusual discharge.

How it's treated: There is no cure for the herpes complex virus. The blisters usually heal by themselves but there is antiviral medication you can take within the first 5 days of symptoms appearing that help to shorten and relieve the symptoms.

Genital Warts

Genital warts are one of the most common viral sexually transmitted infections. They are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) that gets passed on through sexual contact. The symptoms can appear weeks, months or years after being exposed to the virus.

Symptoms: flesh-coloured or grey painless growths or lumps around your vagina, penis, anus or upper thighs, itching or bleeding from your genitals or anus, changes to your normal flow of pee (for example, sideways) that doesn't go away.

How it's treated: either by applying a cream or by freezing / heating the warts to remove them.

