

Wondering about

STIs?

## Wondering about STIs?

Are you wondering about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and how they might affect you? If so, this pamphlet may help you learn how to reduce your risk of getting an STI and where to go and what to do if you think you have one.

Sex can be fun and pleasurable; however, worrying about STIs may lessen sexual pleasure.

In this pamphlet, we use “sex” to refer to sexual intercourse, vaginal intercourse, frontal sex, oral sex and/or anal sex. We also use the words vagina and penis. Some people use other words to suit their identities and culture. We support you in using the language that feels best for you.

## What are STIs?

STIs are common infections that can be passed from one person to another during sex. Examples are chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and HIV.

Some STIs can also pass from one person to another through skin-to-skin intimate contact such as genital herpes and HPV. You may hear the term STBBIs. This stands for Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections because some STIs are transmitted through blood including HIV, Hepatitis B and



Hepatitis C. In this pamphlet, we will use the term “STIs”.


If you have an STI, it is important to treat it as soon as possible to prevent health complications including infertility.

## How do you know if you have an STI?

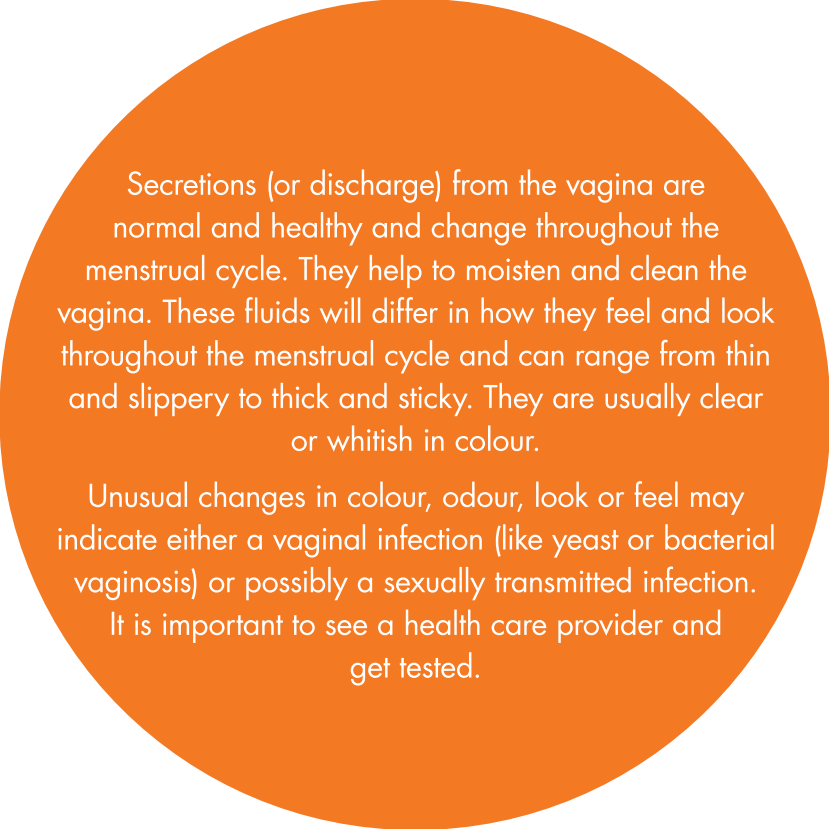
You may get symptoms from an STI or **you may not**. The only way to know for sure is to get tested.

If you have symptoms, they may include:

- itching, redness or swelling around your vagina or penis
- burning sensation when peeing
- unusual discharge (with or without odour) from your vagina, penis or anus
- pain in your abdomen
- bleeding when it is not your period
- pain when having sex
- a bump, a sore or a rash (with or without pain) on or around your throat, genitals or anus



Remember you may have no symptoms from an STI and pass it to others unknowingly. Doing regular STI testing will help you to find the infection and treat it.



Secretions (or discharge) from the vagina are normal and healthy and change throughout the menstrual cycle. They help to moisten and clean the vagina. These fluids will differ in how they feel and look throughout the menstrual cycle and can range from thin and slippery to thick and sticky. They are usually clear or whitish in colour.

Unusual changes in colour, odour, look or feel may indicate either a vaginal infection (like yeast or bacterial vaginosis) or possibly a sexually transmitted infection.

It is important to see a health care provider and get tested.

## How is an STI detected?

Your health care provider will talk with you about which STI tests you may need. It can take several days or weeks after exposure for the tests to be able to detect infection.

Testing can include:

- a urine sample
- a blood sample
- swab from the throat, penis, vagina or anus
- a swab from a sore

If you are having symptoms, your health care provider may be able to determine if you have an STI upon examination.

## How do I reduce my risk of getting an STI?

- Use a barrier (i.e., condom, glove or dam) every time you have sex and use a new barrier for each partner
- Use lube to increase pleasure, reduce friction and prevent the barrier from breaking
- Discuss with your partner(s) about ways to reduce risk before having sex
- Keep the conversation going with your partner(s) about what you need to have for safer sex
- If you notice changes in your body (i.e., unusual secretions/discharge, odour, pain, itching, a sore or rash), see your health care provider
- If sharing sex toys, cover them with a barrier and use a new barrier for each partner
- Talk to your health care provider about vaccination (i.e., Hep A, Hep B and HPV)
- Get tested regularly
- Encourage your partner(s) to get tested regularly
- Tell your partner(s) if you have an STI so they can get tested and treated
- Follow treatment advice if you have an STI

## Sexual Health Clinics

Sexual Health Clinics offer free and confidential services, including:

- STI testing and free treatment
- HIV testing and referrals
- Free condoms
- Low cost birth control
- Emergency contraception
- Pregnancy testing/counselling and referrals

**Call the Sexual Health InfoLine Ontario (SHILO) at 416-392-2437 or visit [toronto.ca/health](https://toronto.ca/health) to find a location near you.**

