

Myth **I am unlikely to get a sexually transmitted infection.**

Fact STIs are very common, many have only mild, few or no symptoms. Most of us will acquire at least one STI in our life. One in two sexually active young people will get an STI by the age of 25. Most will not know it.

Myth **It is shameful to get an STI.**

Fact Sexually transmitted infections are so common that anyone who has ever had sex may get an STI. It's not about being good, bad, clean or dirty it's about being normal and sexually active. You can reduce your chances of getting an STI by using condoms with all new partners and having regular sexual health checks.

Myth **I would always know if I had an STI.**

Fact You may have no symptoms at all and have an STI without knowing it. The signs and symptoms of some STIs are very mild and may appear weeks or months after being infected. Even if you have used protection in the past, no method of protected sex is 100% safe. To prevent the spread of STIs and reduce the risk of catching an STI, use condoms and have regular STI checks.

Myth **All STIs are curable.**

Fact Not all STIs are curable. STIs that are caused by bacterial infections, once diagnosed, can generally be easily treated and cured. However, viral infections such as HSV (Herpes Simplex Virus), HPV (Human Papillomavirus) and HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) can only be managed, not cured.

Myth **Oral sex is safe sex as you can't contract or pass on an STI this way.**

Fact Many STIs can be passed on by oral sex. For example, Herpes (HSV), which causes cold sores, is commonly transmitted to the genitals. And Genital HPV is increasingly associated with oral HPV through oral sex transmission. Syphilis, a serious sexually transmitted infection, can also be transmitted through oral sex.

Myth **I can get an STI from toilet seats**

Fact STIs are not transmitted from toilet seats. They are spread through direct (skin-to-skin) sexual contact, or by coming into contact with infected body fluids during vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Myth **Syphilis and gonorrhoea are STIs of the past. Modern medicine has cured them.**

Fact Rates of gonorrhoea (particularly in young people aged between 15 and 25) and syphilis (particularly with men who have sex with men) are increasing. If you have had unprotected sex, get tested. Gonorrhoea is increasingly hard to treat as it is resistant to some antibiotics.

Myth **I had unprotected sex. I feel fine, so I must be fine.**

Fact Symptoms of many STIs may take days, weeks or even longer to present, and many may never cause symptoms, e.g., chlamydia. Testing for all STIs after having unprotected sex is important.

Myth **An STI check includes tests for all STIs.**

Fact An STI check tests for the common bacterial STIs. Herpes, HPV and HIV are caused by viruses and are not routinely tested for unless symptoms are present. Ask what your STI check includes and does not include. An HIV test is not included automatically but can be done if requested.

Myth **A cervical smear includes tests for STIs.**

Fact Many women think a cervical smear includes tests for all STIs, but it doesn't. A smear tests for abnormal cells on your cervix that cause cancer of the cervix. Ask your doctor or smear taker if you would like to be tested for STIs as well.

Myth **I will never get, or pass on, an STI because I always use condoms.**

Fact Condoms greatly reduce STI transmission, but they don't completely eliminate the risk of getting or transmitting an STI. Condoms don't always cover the area that may be infected with certain STIs. Proper and consistent use of condoms greatly lowers the chances of spreading STIs. Reducing the numbers of sexual partners and having regular STI checks also helps prevent spreading STIs.

Myth **I am only likely to get one STI at a time.**

Fact It is not uncommon to have more than one STI at a time. Infection with most STIs increases the risk of getting co-infection with HIV. HIV-positive people with other STIs can transmit HIV more easily to partners.

Myth **I have had chlamydia twice so I must be infertile.**

Fact Risk of infertility increases with repeated infections of chlamydia or gonorrhoea but does not mean guaranteed infertility. Regular testing and early effective treatment will reduce the chances of infertility.

Myth **I am on the pill so I am protected.**

Fact The pill (oral contraceptive pill) only protects against pregnancy—*not* STIs.

Myth **If I ask my boyfriend to use a condom he will think I don't trust him.**

Fact Using a condom is protecting both you and your boyfriend. Sometimes refusal to use a condom is a form of control and is not good in a healthy relationship. If you need support with your relationship, read our section on unhealthy or unhappy relationships. Before deciding not to use condoms, you and your partner should both have sexual health checks.

Myth **I gave a urine sample to the nurse and it came back negative for chlamydia so I must be okay.**

Fact It's possible to have another, different STI, so you need a full sexual health check to be sure you are okay.

Myth **I shared my boyfriend's STI antibiotic pills, therefore I don't need to go for a check up.**

Fact Different STIs need different types of treatments. A prescription of antibiotics needs to be taken in full by the person they were subscribed for, or the infection may not be cured. It is a risk sharing pills that are not prescribed specifically for you by a health professional.