

Sexual Health and You

A light purple silhouette of a woman standing, facing away from the viewer, positioned on the right side of the image. The background is a solid purple color with decorative, swirling floral patterns in a lighter shade of purple.

Produced by Bayer

However much you know about sex, take some time to leaf through what we have to say - it might save you a lot of embarrassment in the future...

Index

The bad news	3
The good news	4
Chlamydia	5
Gonorrhoea	7
Genital herpes	9
Genital warts	11
HIV	13
Condoms	15
Some tips	17
More info	19



Okay, so here it is: the bad news about sex.

Sexually transmitted infections – STIs – are infections that can be caught or passed when you have sex or close sexual contact with another person.


STIs are a lot more common than you'd think. In this booklet, you'll be able to swot up on the main culprits so, even if you're not ready now, you'll know how to protect yourself in the future.

Thankfully, there's also good news!

When you're in control of your body, clued-up and aware of the risks, sex can be a lot of fun.

So while the scare stories about STIs are real, and rates of infection are high, the good news is you CAN avoid these issues...

Knowing the signs and symptoms is a pretty good start: practising safe sex is the rest of the story.



This bacterial infection is one of the most frequently reported STIs in Ireland. Thankfully it's straightforward for you to get tested (a simple swab or urine test) and easy to treat (a dose of antibiotics and you're all clear).

Chlamydia

What to look for:

Women: Unusual vaginal discharge, pain when weeing, heavy periods or bleeding between periods, abdominal pain and/or bleeding during vaginal sex.

Men: White/cloudy discharge from penis, pain when weeing, painful swelling of testicles.

Up to 70% of people with chlamydia don't have any symptoms - so you may have it and not know!

What to do:

Get tested asap! Left untreated, chlamydia can cause pelvic pain, inflammation and possibly **infertility**. Your local GP surgery, family planning clinic, sexual health clinic or even high-street pharmacist can offer free testing.

A bacterial infection like chlamydia, but less common. Women aged 15-19 and men aged 20-24 are most at risk. Unfortunately about 50% of women won't show obvious symptoms and won't realise they've got it. Gonorrhoea also increases the risk of HIV transmission.

An illustration in the top right corner featuring a blue condom, two sets of lips (one pink, one blue), and a white silhouette of a person in a dress. The background is dark blue with decorative white floral patterns at the bottom.

Gonorrhoea
aka 'The Clap'

What to look for:


Men & Women: White, yellow or green genital discharge, frequent need to wee, pain when weeing, lower stomach pain (rare).

Women: May have heavier periods or bleed between periods.

Men: May get painful testicles.

What to do:

Get tested asap! If left untreated, gonorrhoea can lead to inflammation of the joints or eyes, infection of the throat or rectum, and infertility - all of which can be avoided, as gonorrhoea can be treated with a single dose of antibiotics.



A common viral infection caused by the herpes simplex virus. Herpes is passed through unprotected sex but also touching or kissing genitals. After initial exposure, the virus can lie inactive in your body for a while, before breaking out as genital herpes again and again.

Genital Herpes



What to look for:

Men & Women: Tingling or itching genitals, followed by small, painful blisters, flu-like symptoms – headache, backache, a temperature, a burning sensation when you wee.

Women: Vaginal discharge.

Genital herpes is most infectious when sores or blisters show (the only time you can test for it). Again, you may have the virus but not the symptoms.

What to do:

Most people will only have one or two attacks but it can be a regular thing. No cure is available yet, but anti-viral drugs can reduce the severity of the symptoms – what's important is to get treatment asap.

The most commonly-transmitted STI – especially among women aged 16-19 and men aged 20-24. Genital warts are caused by strains 6 and 11 of the human papilloma virus (HPV). HPV is also linked to cervical cancer. Easily passed through unprotected sex, shared sex toys, or simply when genital skin touches.




Genital Warts

What to look for:

Warts can take a year or more to develop after infection. If warts aren't present, the virus can't be tested for, but that's not to say you won't have it – warts aren't always visible, especially if they occur inside the vagina, on the cervix, or in the anus.

What to do:

Warts can be zapped by applying creams, lotions or chemical ointments, by freezing, or by surgical removal under local anaesthetic. Best to avoid them in the first place!

A purple silhouette of a person is positioned on the left side of the slide. To its right, there are decorative white swirls that extend upwards and across the top of the slide.

HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus that causes Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Over 6,000 people are estimated to be living with HIV in Ireland. It is estimated that about 15% of those living with HIV don't know they have it.

Sexually-active gay men are most at risk, but straight-sex cases increase each year, due to: unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex; sharing needles; mothers infecting their babies.

HIV is **not** transmitted by everyday social contact, like shaking hands, kissing, sharing toilet seats, cutlery or swimming pools!

HIV

A decorative border at the bottom of the slide features purple floral motifs and white swirls on a dark purple background.

What to look for:

It's difficult. People with HIV may have no symptoms for a long time, often 10 years or more. As people change from HIV- to HIV+ they may get fever, malaise and a rash. As the immune system fails, they may get oral thrush and shingles. HIV progressively damages the body's immune system so it can't fight infections or tumours and AIDS develops.

What to do:

HIV is preventable and treatable, but there is **no cure**. Current treatment consists of a combination of three or more antiviral drugs, taken every day - for life. Treatments are still being developed.

As you can tell by now, STIs are well worth avoiding. You may not have one and you may trust your partner, but can you trust their previous partners?

Condoms



The best way to avoid an STI is to use a condom every time you have sex.

When used properly, condoms are one of the most effective ways of stopping STIs and avoiding pregnancy (using another form of contraception too is the best way to steer clear of unexpected additions to your family).

Condoms are sold in supermarkets, pharmacies and vending machines - so you can buy them without asking a soul.

Some tips on condoms

Your first time?
Read the packet's
instructions

Oil-based
lubricants destroy
condom latex

Never ever
re-use a
condom

Some condoms come
lubricated with spermicide
(to kill sperm)

Beware: even fluid released before sex contains sperm!!

Always check the 'use by' date

All done? Hold the condom base while he pulls out (so it won't slip off)

Squeeze the tip first before rolling down (to get rid of air)

Wrap in a tissue & whack it in the bin (not the loo!)

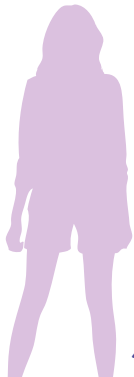
More info:

Speak to your GP, Practice Nurse or Family Planning Clinic for more information.

For a list of sexual health clinics in your area check out HSE STI services in Ireland <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/hse-sti-services-in-ireland.html> or contact the Guide Clinic at St James' Hospital on (01) 416 2315 for further advice.

References:

- 1: Health Protection Surveillance Centre STI Report 2018
- 2: Statistics from the Sexualwellbeing.ie report 2018



Notes...







MIX
Paper

FSC FSC® C007881

PP-PF-WHC-IE-0241