

Some questions and answers about HIV and STIs

Question	Answer
Can I tell if someone has an STI?	Not always. There are often no signs of an STI. At the start of infection, HIV has no signs.
Why do other STIs open the door to HIV?	People with STIs often have sores and blisters. HIV spreads easily through blood and broken skin.
Can females get HIV more easily than males?	Yes. This is because their sex organs take up a bigger surface of skin than males'. So there is more opportunity for HIV to enter their bodies.
My friend just heard that she is HIV positive. I am so scared. Does this mean that she is dying?	No. There is no cure for HIV but people infected with it can live for a long time if they look after themselves and get treatment. Your friend will need to take ARVs every day to help her body stay strong. She also needs to be very careful not to spread HIV to other people when she has sex.
If a male is circumcised, does this mean he cannot get HIV?	No. Even though medical circumcision reduces the chance of getting HIV, it does not prevent the transmission of HIV. Always wear a condom during sex.

What should you do if you think you have an STI?

All STIs can be treated with medicine and many can be cured. Don't let shame or shyness stop you from getting help.

If you have had unprotected sex, go to your clinic and ask to be checked for STIs. The sooner you are checked, the faster the treatment can begin to work if you do have an STI.

If you have an STI, you must tell the person you had sex with so that they can also go to the clinic for treatment. If they don't get treatment then they may infect you again. Ask your health worker to give you advice about this.

All STIs can be treated and many can be cured.

Points to remember about STIs, including HIV

- An STI is an infection you get from having sex.
- You can't always tell whether you have an STI or not.
- You can protect yourself from STIs by:
 - abstaining from sex
 - using a condom every time you have sex.
- Test for HIV and other STIs if you have had unprotected sex.
- All STIs can be treated and many can be cured.
- Untreated STIs can make you sick and make you vulnerable to HIV.
- If you have an STI, both you and your partner must go to the clinic for treatment.
- HIV spreads mostly through unprotected sex.
- HIV attacks the immune system of the body and makes it weaker over time.
- HIV is a very serious disease and needs to be treated with ARVs.
- Females are at greater risk of getting HIV than males.
- Always use a condom, even if your partner is circumcised.
- Protecting your own health also protects the health of the person you have sex with. This helps to prevent STIs spreading between people.

Ask for advice and help

Don't let shame or shyness stop you from getting help. Health workers at the clinic are there to help you and answer your questions. You can also phone one of these helpline numbers:

loveLife 0800 121 900 or sms 'plz cal me' to 083 323 1023

National AIDS helpline 0800 012 322

For more information on sexual and reproductive health for girls, look for all of the other leaflets in this series: Puberty, Teenage Pregnancy, Contraception, and HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT).



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**Sexually Transmitted Infections
including HIV**

Sexually Transmitted Infections including HIV

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections that are passed on through sexual activity. The infection lives in sores and blisters on the sexual organs and in body fluids: semen, the fluids in the vagina and blood. The most common STIs are gonorrhoea, syphilis, genital warts, herpes and HIV.

How does an STI pass from one person to another?

You get an STI if you have unprotected sex with someone who already has an STI. The STI can get passed on when the body fluids of two people come into contact. Blisters or sores on a person's body, especially on the sex organs, allow an STI to spread very easily. You can get an STI if you have unprotected sex even once. The more people you have unprotected sex with, the more chance you have of getting an STI.

How to prevent STIs

Your body is precious. You can look after it and protect it from STIs by abstaining from sex and concentrating on finishing your education. The time to enjoy sex with the right partner will come when you are older and ready to make a good decision. But if you do have sex

- Always wear a condom, even if you have a steady partner.
- Do not have sex with many different partners.
- Remember that having a partner who is five years or more older than you increases your chance of getting HIV.

Protecting your own health also protects the health of the person you have sex with. This helps to prevent STIs spreading between people.

Signs that you may have an STI

Different STIs have different signs. Common signs are:

- sores, blisters, rashes, swelling or warts around the vagina or penis
- unusual smell or fluid from the penis or vagina
- itching, burning or pain around the vagina or penis
- burning or pain when passing urine (peeing)
- swollen or sore glands
- stomach pain.

What about HIV?

HIV is the most dangerous of all STIs because, while it can be treated, there is no cure. It is a big cause of illness in South Africa.

HIV attacks the body's immune system, which protects it from disease. After some time, when the body is too weak to fight infection, lots of different diseases invade it. Then it is called AIDS.

HIV can be treated with medication that needs to be taken every day. This medication is called antiretrovirals or ARVs.



STIs, including HIV, spread mainly through unprotected sex.

How does HIV spread?

- HIV spreads mostly through unprotected sex (sex without a condom).
- HIV lives in fluids such as semen, vaginal fluid and blood. There is a high risk of HIV spreading when fluids mix between two people during unprotected sex.
- Females are at greater risk of HIV than males. This is because their sex organs take up a bigger surface of skin than males'. So there is more opportunity for HIV to enter their bodies.

These **CANNOT** spread HIV

Sneezing, breathing or coughing on someone



Mosquitoes and other insects and animals



Eating food prepared by someone who has HIV, or sharing cups, plates and eating utensils



Toilet seats, shared swimming pools, baths or showers



Tears, saliva (spit) or kissing or hugging someone



These **CAN** spread HIV

- **Unprotected sex:** i.e. sex without a condom
- **Blood:** menstrual blood (when you have your period); or blood on a toothbrush or razor that you shared with someone else; or sharing needles for injections with someone else
- **Mother-to-child transmission:** i.e. a mother who has HIV passing it on to her baby, either before the baby is born or while breastfeeding

HIV spreads mainly through unprotected sex. You can protect yourself from STIs by: abstaining from sex until you are older or using a condom every time you have sex.