

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Gay Men's Health Fact Sheet Series

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Anyone who is sexually active can potentially catch a sexually transmitted infection (STI). STIs are usually transmitted during unprotected sex (including oral sex) with an infected partner, but can be transmitted in other ways as well. Some STIs can be transmitted without showing any symptoms. It is strongly recommended that you get tested regularly for STIs if you are sexually active. It is important to have a doctor or nurse to go to for testing.

If you experience any symptoms of a possible infection, it is wise to seek medical help and treatment immediately.

Whether HIV-positive or HIV-negative, practising safer sex can reduce the risk and help maintain a healthy sex life.

For more information about safer sex and harm reduction refer to the fact sheet on *Sexual Health and Safer Sex* and *Gay Men, Drugs and Alcohol*. To help with risk assessment, refer to the following overview of common STIs.



Name	How is it transmitted?	What does it look like?	Is it curable or treatable?
Virus			
Herpes	Skin to skin contact, or contact with contaminated body fluids (semen).	Tingling and redness or swelling at site of infection. Small clusters of blisters burst open revealing sensitive sores. Sores scab over and eventually skin heals.	NO - There is no cure for herpes infections. Infection is for life. Treatments can reduce severity and duration of herpes outbreaks.
Hepatitis A	Direct or indirect oral-fecal contact, including through fisting or use of sex toys.	Jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), dark urine, pale stools, nausea, fatigue, fever, vomiting, abdominal pain.	NO - There is no treatment for Hepatitis A. A vaccine preventing infection is available and recommended for sexually active gay men.
Hepatitis B	Exchange of bodily fluids containing virus (blood, semen) through unprotected penetration, fisting, or shared needles, razors, toothbrushes or sex toys.	Jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), dark urine, pale stools, nausea, fatigue, fever, vomiting, abdominal pain.	NO - Not curable but there is drug therapy treatment for Hepatitis B. Life-long infectious state occurs in 10% of cases. Can lead to scarring of the liver or liver cancer. A vaccine preventing infection is available and recommended for sexually active gay men.
Hepatitis C	Exchange of blood containing virus through unprotected penetration, fisting or shared needles, razors or sex toys.	Jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes), dark urine, pale stools, nausea, fatigue, fever, vomiting, abdominal pain.	NO - Not curable but there is drug therapy with Interferon and Ribavirin but there is no vaccine for Hepatitis C.
HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus	Exchange of bodily fluids containing virus (blood, semen) through unprotected penetration or shared needles, including fisting and sex toys.	<p>Primary infection - In most cases, symptoms are similar to having a bad cold: fever, headache, fatigue, sore throat, aches and pain. However, some 30% of people infected show no symptoms.</p> <p>This is followed by an asymptomatic phase, with no noticeable symptoms. A symptomatic phase follows, with irregular symptoms such as in primary infection, with the additions of night sweats, weight loss, diarrhea, vomiting, nausea and fungal infections. With symptoms related to specific opportunistic infections, this eventually progresses to an AIDS diagnosis. The HIV virus is transmittable during all of these stages.</p>	NO - There is no cure for HIV infection. Infection is for life. HIV weakens immune system, leading to development of certain diseases called opportunistic infections and ultimately to death. There are medications that can slow progression of HIV disease in some people.

Name	How is it transmitted?	What does it look like?	Is it curable or treatable?
HPV - Human Papilloma Virus	Direct contact with infected wart, lesion or infected secretions, including through fisting.	<p>Warts on genitals, on or around anus, in rectum or in mouth. They can appear flat, round or sprout-like, and can appear as red, pink or skin coloured.</p> <p>Warts in rectum are detected through digital or visual rectal examination, or by the presence of blood in stool.</p>	NO - There is no cure for HPV infection. Infection is for life. Treatment burns warts using electrical charge, freezing, acid or topical lotion to reduce amount of virus and risk of transmission. HPV can increase the risk of penile or anal cancer.
Bacteria			
Chlamydia	Exchange of bodily fluids containing bacteria through anus, mouth and genitals through unprotected oral or anal sex, including fisting and sharing sex toys.	40-70% of people infected show no symptoms. Burning sensation while urinating. Yellow or greenish discharge from penis often accompanied by pain. Swollen or tender testicles.	YES - Treatable with antibiotics. Left untreated, can cause long term complications such as sterility(cannot produce children), proctitis (inflammation of rectal lining), or colitis (inflammation of the lining of the large bowel).
LGV - Lymphogranuloma Venereum (a subtype of Chlamydia)	Exchange of bodily fluids containing bacteria through anus, mouth and genitals through unprotected oral or anal sex including fisting and sharing sex toys.	A painless sore may appear on the penis, or in the anus or mouth. Swollen glands, painful inflammation of the infected area and yellow or greenish discharge.	YES - Treatable with antibiotics. Left untreated, can cause serious long term complications such as hepatitis(liver disease) and encephalitis(inflammation of the brain).
Gonorrhoea	Exchange of bodily fluids containing bacteria through anus, mouth and genitals through unprotected oral or anal sex including fisting and sharing sex toys.	Half of people infected show no symptoms. Burning sensation while urinating. Yellow or greenish discharge from penis often accompanied by pain. Rectal discharge and/or itching, and possible painful bowel movements with blood in the stool. Throat infections can cause pain in swallowing, discharge or local pain.	YES - Treatable with antibiotics. Left untreated, can cause long term complications.
Syphilis	Exchange of bodily fluids containing bacteria through anus, mouth and genitals through unprotected oral or anal sex including fisting and sharing sex toys.	<p>Stage 1 - Painless ulcers or sores (chancres) on genitals, in anus or mouth (lips, tongue, tonsils) which disappear without treatment.</p> <p>Stage 2 - Skin blotches, fever, fatigue, headaches, aches and pain appear and disappear without treatment.</p> <p>Stage 3 - Possible serious irreversible damage to bones, heart, brain and eyes.</p>	YES - Treatable with antibiotics. Left untreated, can cause serious long term complications such as brain or heart disorders.

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Parasites			
Amoebas	Direct or indirect oral-fecal contact including fisting and sharing sex toys.	Range from no symptoms to watery, smelly or bloody diarrhea, gas, cramps, stomach pain. Sometimes fever, nausea, vomiting or headaches occur.	YES - Can be treated with medications such as antibiotics and antifungals
Crabs (Body lice)	Close physical contact, or sharing bedding, clothing or towels with someone who has them. Can survive away from the body for 24 hours.	Itching in areas when there is body hair (groin, buttocks, thighs, lower abdomen, chest, armpits, beard, eyebrows and lashes). Small grey or reddish-brown crab-like insects seen upon close inspection. Closer inspection may find waxy white eggs attached to base of body hairs.	YES - Two treatments of infested areas with medicated lotions, creams and shampoos followed by removal of eggs usually destroys crabs and scabies. Contaminated clothing, towels, and bedding should be washed in hot water and inspected for eggs and nits before reuse.
Scabies	Close physical contact, or sharing bedding, clothing or towels with someone who has them. Infection can spread rapidly through prolonged contact in closed environments (such as bathhouses).	Intense itchiness in armpits, groin, buttocks, and can be especially itchy at night. Pimples and bumps may appear in these areas. Extremely small insect burrows beneath surface of skin. Burrowing trails can be seen between fingers, on wrists and ankles.	YES - Two treatments of infested areas with medicated lotions, creams and shampoos followed by removal of eggs usually destroys crabs and scabies. Contaminated clothing, towels, and bedding should be washed in hot water and inspected for eggs and nits before reuse.

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