SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS: MESSAGES

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What are STIs?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are spread predominantly by unprotected sexual contact. Some STIs can also be transmitted during pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding and through infected blood or blood products.

STIs have a profound impact on health. If untreated, they can lead to serious consequences including neurological and cardiovascular disease, infertility, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirths, and increased risk of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). They are also associated with stigma, domestic violence, and affects quality of life.

The majority of STIs have no symptoms. When they are present common symptoms of STIs are vaginal or urethral discharge, genital ulcer and lower abdominal pain.

The most common and curable STIs are trichomonas, chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis.

Risks of unprotected sex

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) are extremely contagious. They can be caught through having unprotected sex - that is sex without using a condom. They can be painful and lead to sickness, infertility and complications during pregnancy if left untreated.

Signs and Symptoms of STIs for women

If you have unusual vaginal discharge or there is a change in colour or smell of your vaginal discharge, if you have ulcers on your genitals, pain when urinating or lower abdominal pain, you may have a sexually transmitted infection. Seek medical help immediately from [insert info] as you may need medical treatment.

Signs and Symptoms of STIs for men

If you have unusual discharge from your penis, ulcers on your genitals, pain when urinating, swellings in the groin or scrotum, you may have a sexually transmitted infection and may need immediate treatment. Seek medical help immediately from [insert info].

How to prevent infection

To prevent sexually transmitted infections, use a condom consistently and correctly when having any type of sex (oral, vaginal or anal sex, or genital-to-genital contact). Another way of avoiding infections is to abstain from sexual intercourse (oral, vaginal or anal sex, or genital-to-genital contact).
Importance of wearing condoms

Condoms are often the easiest and most effective way of preventing sexually transmitted infections. Use a condom correctly and consistently every time you have sex. When you buy condoms, ensure they are not stored in a very hot place or in direct sunlight. Make sure there are no staples or holes through the packet. Check that it is not passed the expiry date on the packet. There are two types of condoms: male condoms and female condoms. Male condoms are rolled over the penis before any type of sexual intercourse when the penis is erect. Female condoms are inserted into the vagina before sex starts. If you need further advice on how to use a condom contact [insert info].

Location of facilities providing free condoms

You can get free condoms at [insert info]. Opening times are from [insert time] to [insert time].

What help is available if you are worried you have a STI?

If you have unprotected sex or are worried about having a sexually transmitted infection, contact [insert info]. You will get advice on treatment, how to prevent infection and how to manage any infections you may have. All information you provide to your health-worker is confidential. Opening hours are from [insert time] to [insert time].

REFERENCES

For more information on this topic, we recommend you read the following references.

World Health Organization (2022). Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
https://www.who.int/health-topics/sexually-transmitted-infections#tab=tab_1

World Health Organization Factsheets:
Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-(stis)
Cervical cancer
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cervical-cancer
Multi-drug resistant gonorrhoea
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/multi-drug-resistant-gonorrhoea
HIV/AIDS
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hiv-aids
Hepatitis B
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-b
Herpes simplex virus
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/herpes-simplex-virus
Antibiotic resistance
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antibiotic-resistance
Infertility
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/infertility
Human T-lymphotropic virus type 1
https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/human-t-lymphotropic-virus-type-1
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