

A Guide to Sexually Transmitted Infections



Description

HIV stands for:

Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

The virus weakens your ability to fight infections and disease, such as cancer.

AIDS stands for:

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

This is the final stage of HIV infection, when your body can no longer fight life-threatening infections.

In 2018, it was estimated that there are 103 800 people living with HIV in the UK.

- 93% of these people are diagnosed, and therefore know that they have HIV. ...
- 97% of people diagnosed with HIV in the UK are on treatment, and 97% of those on treatment are virally suppressed which means they can't pass the virus on.

How can I catch it?

The most common ways of getting HIV in the UK are:

- having unprotected sex, including vaginal, oral and anal sex
- using a contaminated needle or syringe to inject drugs
- from mother to baby, before or during birth, or by breastfeeding

The best way to prevent HIV is to practice safe sex and use a condom, or if you inject drugs, do not share needles.

Symptoms

Many people with HIV have no symptoms for several years while the virus spreads and silently damages their health. Others may develop symptoms similar to flu, usually two to six weeks after catching the virus.

Symptoms of early HIV infection, also called primary HIV infection include:

- fever
- sore throat
- tiredness
- joint pain
- muscle pain
- swollen glands (nodes) a blotchy skin rash

After the initial symptoms disappear, HIV will often not cause any further symptoms for many years.

During this time, known as asymptomatic HIV infection, the virus continues to spread and damage your immune system. This process can take about 10 years during which you will feel and appear well.

Test

Blood Test

Treatment

The treatment for HIV is called antiretroviral therapy (ART). ART involves taking a combination of HIV medicines (called an HIV treatment regimen) every day. ART is recommended for everyone who has HIV. ART can't cure HIV, but HIV medicines help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives. ART also reduces the risk of HIV transmission.



Description

Chlamydia is one of the most commonly reported bacterial infections. When statistics were last updated in 2015, there were 200,288 chlamydia diagnoses. More than 150,000 of these infections were in people aged 24 or younger.

How can I catch it?

It's passed on from one person to another through unprotected sex (sex without a condom).

Symptoms

Most people who have Chlamydia don't notice any symptoms, and so don't know they have it. Research suggests that 50% of men and 70-80% of women don't get symptoms at all with Chlamydia infection.

Symptoms of Chlamydia could be pain when you urinate (pee), unusual discharge from the penis, vagina or rectum or, in women, bleeding between periods or after sex

Test

Testing for Chlamydia is done with a urine test or a swab test. Anyone can get a free confidential Chlamydia test at a sexual health clinic, a GUM (genitourinary medicine) clinic or a GP surgery.

Treatment

Chlamydia is easily treated with antibiotics. If Chlamydia isn't treated, the infection can sometimes spread to other parts of your body and lead to serious long-term health problems such as pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility (not being able to have children).



Description

Pubic lice are not linked to poor personal hygiene. They are spread through close body contact with someone who has them. The lice crawl from hair to hair but cannot fly or jump. They need human blood to survive, so generally only leave the body to move from one person to another.

How can I catch it?

Pubic lice are most commonly passed on during sexual contact. Condoms will not prevent them from being passed to another person. It is also possible for pubic lice to be spread through sharing clothes, towels and bedding.

Symptoms

- itching in the affected areas
- inflammation or irritation in the affected areas caused by scratching
- black powder in your underwear
- blue-coloured spots on your skin where the lice are living, such as on your thighs or lower abdomen (these are caused by lice bites)
- tiny blood spots on your underwear or skin

Test

You can see crabs with the naked eye, they're about 1 mm in diameter, and if you keep staring at them you will see their legs move like a swimmer's breast-stroke as they try to move using surrounding hair.

Treatment

You can treat pubic lice yourself at home by using a special type of lotion, cream or shampoo. Your doctor or pharmacist can advise you on which treatment to use and how to use it. It's important to follow this advice. Products include Kwellada lotion and Derbac M liquid and you can get this from a chemist.

The treatment is applied to all the hairy areas on your body, except for the hair on your head, eyebrows and eyelashes. It usually needs to be repeated after three to seven days.



Description

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhoea* or gonococcus. It used to be known as "the clap". The bacteria are found mainly in discharge from the penis and vaginal fluid from infected men and women.

Gonorrhoea is the second most common bacterial STI in the UK after chlamydia. In 2017, more than 44,500 people were diagnosed with gonorrhoea in England, with most cases affecting young men and women under the age of 25.

How can I catch it?

Gonorrhoea is easily passed between people through:

- unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex
- sharing vibrators or other sex aids that haven't been washed or covered with a new condom each time they are used

Symptoms

In women, symptoms of gonorrhoea can include:

- an unusual discharge from the vagina, which may be thick and green or yellow in colour
- pain when passing urine
- pain or tenderness in the lower abdominal area (this is less common)
- bleeding between periods or heavier periods (this is less common)

Nine out of 10 men who contract gonorrhoea experience symptoms after they are infected, which can include:

- an unusual discharge from the tip of the penis, which may be white, yellow or green
- pain or a burning sensation when urinating
- inflammation (swelling) of the foreskin
- pain or tenderness in the testicles or prostate gland (this is rare)

Both men and women can also catch gonorrhoea at other sites of the body. These include infection in the:

- rectum, which may cause pain, discomfort or discharge
- throat, which does not usually have any symptoms
- eyes, which can cause pain, swelling, irritation and discharge (conjunctivitis)

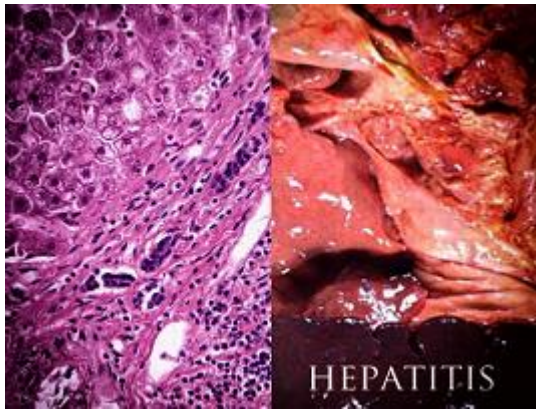
Test

Most of the time, urine can be used to test for gonorrhoea. However, if you have had oral and/or anal sex, swabs may be used to collect samples from your throat and/or rectum. In some cases, a swab may be used to collect a sample from a man's urethra (urine canal) or a woman's cervix (opening to the womb).

Treatment

It is important to receive treatment for gonorrhoea quickly. The infection will not go away without treatment.

Gonorrhoea is treated with a single dose of antibiotics.



Description

Hepatitis B (HBV) is 50 to 100 times easier to transmit sexually than HIV (the virus that causes AIDS). HBV has been found in vaginal secretions, saliva, and semen. Oral sex and especially anal sex, whether it occurs in a heterosexual or homosexual context, are possible ways of transmitting the virus.

How can I catch it?

It's a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that can be passed on through having sex without a condom or sharing sex toys with someone who has hepatitis B (even if they don't have symptoms); using contaminated needles and syringes or other items with infected blood on them; or from a pregnant woman to her unborn baby.

Symptoms

- flu-like symptoms, including tiredness, fever and aches and pains.
- feeling and/or being sick.
- loss of weight/appetite.
- diarrhoea.
- tummy (abdominal) pain.
- jaundice, meaning your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow.
- dark urine (pee)
- pale faeces (poo).

Test

A blood test carried out by a healthcare professional will show whether you have the virus. You may also be given extra tests to see if your liver is damaged. If you've got hepatitis B you should be tested for other STIs.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for acute hepatitis B, and most people recover within one to two months. Usually, you can manage symptoms at home with painkillers if necessary. Your healthcare professional should advise you to have regular blood tests and physical check-ups. Most people make a full recovery from acute hepatitis B.

If you develop chronic hepatitis B you'll be given treatment to reduce the risk of permanent liver damage and liver cancer. Treatment does not cure chronic hepatitis B and most people who start treatment need to continue on it for life.

- As with most STIs, hepatitis B puts you at risk of other STIs, including HIV.
- Without treatment a pregnant woman with hepatitis B can pass it on to her unborn baby.
- Without treatment, chronic hepatitis B can cause scarring of the liver (cirrhosis), which can cause the liver to stop working properly; a small number of people with cirrhosis develop liver cancer; and these complications can lead to death. Other than a liver transplant, there is no cure for cirrhosis. However, treatments can help relieve some of the symptoms.



Description

In 2018 alone, nearly 33,867 people attended a sexual health clinic in the UK with a first clinical attack of genital herpes.

Genital herpes is caused by the genital herpes simplex virus (HSV). It causes painful blisters to appear on the genitals and the surrounding areas and is the most common ulcerative sexually transmitted infection in the UK.

How can I catch it?

Herpes is highly contagious and can be passed easily from one person to another by direct contact. Genital herpes is usually transmitted by having sex (vaginal, anal or oral) with an infected person. Even if someone with genital herpes does not have any symptoms, it is possible for them to pass the condition on to a sexual partner.

Symptoms

At least 8 out of 10 people who carry the virus are unaware that they have been infected because there are often few or no initial symptoms

Symptoms of genital herpes can include irregular genital pain, vaginal discharge, urinary discomfort, fever, and muscle and groin aches and discomfort. Symptoms of genital herpes can display in and around the genital regions of both men and women.

Test

Your doctor usually can diagnose genital herpes based on a physical exam and the results of certain laboratory tests:

- Viral culture. This test involves taking a tissue sample or scraping of the sores for examination in the laboratory.

- Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test. PCR is used to copy your DNA from a sample of your blood, tissue from a sore or spinal fluid. The DNA can then be tested to establish the presence of HSV and determine which type of HSV you have.
- Blood test. This test analyzes a sample of your blood for the presence of HSV antibodies to detect a past herpes infection.

Treatment

Although there is no cure for genital herpes, the symptoms can usually be effectively controlled using medicines.

The symptoms of genital herpes tend to become less frequent and less severe with each recurring episode of the condition.



Description

Syphilis is a bacterial infection. I

How can I catch it?

It is usually passed on through having sex with someone who is infected. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her unborn child and, in rare cases, can be caught through injecting drugs.

It is extremely rare to catch syphilis through a blood transfusion in the UK as blood donors are carefully screened.

Symptoms

Stage 1 (primary syphilis).

Symptoms of syphilis begin with a painless but highly infectious sore on the genitals or sometimes around the mouth.

If somebody else comes into close contact with the sore, typically during sexual contact, they can also become infected. The sore lasts two to six weeks before disappearing.

Stage 2 (secondary syphilis).

Secondary symptoms, such as a skin rash and sore throat, then develop. These symptoms may disappear within a few weeks, after which you experience a latent (hidden) phase with no symptoms, which can last for years. After this, syphilis can progress to its third, most dangerous stage.

Test

You can get tested for syphilis whether or not you have any sores or symptoms. Usually, your nurse or doctor will take a quick blood sample to test you for syphilis. If you have open sores, they may gently take a sample of fluid from the sore with a swab and test it.

Treatment

If diagnosed early, syphilis can be easily treated with antibiotics, usually penicillin injections.

However, if it is not treated, syphilis can progress to a more dangerous form of the disease and cause serious conditions such as stroke, paralysis, blindness or even death.



Description

Genital warts are small fleshy growths, bumps or skin changes that appear on or around the genital or anal area. Genital warts are the result of a viral skin infection that is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).

How can I catch it?

Genital warts can be spread during vaginal or anal sex. However, you do not need to have penetrative sex to pass the infection on because HPV is spread by skin-to-skin contact. Condoms do not provide complete protection because it is possible for the skin around your genital area (that is not covered by the condom) to become infected.

Genital warts are most common in sexually active teenagers and young adults. The highest rates of genital warts occur in males who are between 20 to 24 years of age and females who are between 16 and 19 years of age.

Symptoms

Genital warts are usually painless and do not pose a serious threat to a person's health. However, they can appear unsightly and cause psychological distress.

Test

They can be seen with the eye or felt by touch.

Treatment

Several treatments are available, such as creams and Cryotherapy (freezing the warts) and they have a good rate of success.

However, many treatments can take up to three months before they are fully effective.