

Avoiding Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)

Abstinence is one way of avoiding a sexually transmitted infection. The majority of Australian adults however choose to be sexually active.

If you are sexually active there are ways of reducing your risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted infection or STI.

When used correctly, condoms in combination with a water based lubricant will reduce the risk of many STIs during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Latex gloves also provide barrier protection for sexual activity involving fingers and dams can be used to protect against STIs during oral sex.

Not all STIs have obvious symptoms (e.g. herpes, genital warts and *Chlamydia*) and therefore it can be difficult to know whether you or your partner has an infection.

Practising safe sex by using condoms and dams can be an effective way of reducing the risk of STIs that have no immediate or obvious symptoms.

If you're not sure whether you or your sexual partner has an STI or if you are in a sexual relationship of three months or less you can guard your health and the health of others by always using protective measures such as condoms and dams.

Unsafe or unprotected sex in a relationship

Negotiated safety is where both partners test negative for STIs and mutually agree not to use condoms and dams as part of their sexual relationship.

Negotiated safety provides a safe context for unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex, but for it to work as an agreement three things are essential:

1. **Talking.** Talk openly with your sexual partner and arrive at a mutual agreement about not using condoms and dams, and about the need to be safe from STIs.

2. **Testing.** Test for STIs at least three months after the last time you had unprotected sex with anyone, including your current sexual partner. Three months is usually enough time for most STIs, but not all, to show up on a test. Talk to your doctor about the different incubation periods for other STIs.

If you and your sexual partner both have negative tests for STIs, you can then consider having unprotected sex.

3. **Trusting.** Once you and your sexual partner have made an agreement to have unprotected sex you both have to be willing to stick to it. This will mean having unprotected sex only with the sexual partner who has been tested and cleared of STIs and with whom you have negotiated to have unprotected sex.

You and your sexual partner may also need to talk about reintroducing safe sex practices if either of you engage in unsafe sex outside of the relationship.

If you or your partner has unprotected sex outside of your sexual relationship you will need to return to protective or barrier methods for at least three months and then get tested again.

The contraceptive pill does not provide protection against any STI.

Useful websites

- > **Clinic 275**
<http://www.stdservices.on.net/std>
- > **SHine SA**
<http://www.shinesa.org.au/>