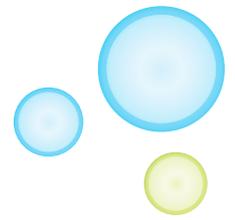


Advice and facts about sexually transmitted infections



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This text provides information about how you can have safer sex and so protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections. Chlamydia is one such infection, as is HIV. Here you can learn about some of the most common infections and what complications may arise if you do not have medical treatment. You can also get tips about who to contact for advice and where to get tested.

STI is the abbreviation used for sexually transmitted infections. These are the same as venereal diseases.

Sexual encounter

For most people, having sex is a positive part of life. Sexual relations are an expression of desire and confirmation. Obviously, having sex doesn't just mean inserting the penis into the vagina, rectum or mouth. Sex can be much more than vaginal intercourse, anal sex or oral sex. Masturbating together is having sex. Using sex toys on your own or together with someone else is also having sex. Each sexual encounter entails a risk for sexually transmitted infection.

WHAT CAUSES INFECTIONS?

Sexually transmitted infections are caused by bacteria and viruses. The infections described here are

- Chlamydia (bacteria)
- Gonorrhoea (bacteria)
- Syphilis (bacteria)
- HIV (virus)
- Genital warts/HPV (virus)
- Herpes (virus)
- Hepatitis (virus)

Bacteria and viruses that cause gonorrhoea, herpes, Chlamydia, genital warts (HPV) and syphilis are often found on the body's mucous membranes when there is an infection. Mucous membranes are the thin skin in the urethra, mouth, throat, vagina and rectum. The viruses that cause genital warts, herpes and syphilis can also be found on the skin around the genitals. Bacteria and viruses can also be found in sperm, vaginal secretions, pus, saliva and blood. HIV and hepatitis viruses are examples of this.

An infection caused by bacteria can be cured. An infection caused by a virus cannot usually be cured by treatment with drugs. However, the symptoms can be relieved and the progress of the infection can be slowed down. If you don't get treatment for an ongoing infection, there may be complications that will affect your health in various ways.

How can you become infected?

Anyone, irrespective of age and sexual orientation, can get a sexually transmitted infection. Irrespective of whether you have sex with women or men and are hetero-, homo or bisexual, you can become infected. To get a sexually transmitted infection you must have unprotected sex with a person carrying the bacteria or viruses that cause these infections.

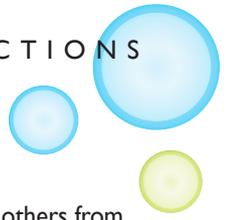
It's not always obvious if a person is carrying an infection. In addition, people aren't always aware themselves that they're carrying an infection. Several sexually transmitted conditions have no symptoms, especially at the beginning of an infection. And it's not certain that you will notice that you have been infected. So you can get an infection from your sexual partner without either of you being aware of it. This also means that you yourself can pass an infection on to a partner without being aware of it.

You can become infected just by having unprotected sex with a single sexual partner. If you have unprotected sex with several sexual partners it's more likely that you will get or pass on an infection.

SOME INFECTIONS ARE SPREAD MORE EASILY THAN OTHERS

Unprotected sex means not using protection such as a condom in a sexual encounter. This increases the probability of various infections being spread. This risk can also vary depending on how you have unprotected sex, i.e., whether you have unprotected vaginal intercourse, anal sex or oral sex.

Some infections are transmitted more easily than others. For example, Chlamydia is transmitted more easily than HIV. Any form of contact with the mucous membranes of the genitals can be all that is needed for the bacteria to be spread. So you don't need to have vaginal intercourse, anal sex or oral sex to get Chlamydia.



When you have an untreated sexually transmitted infection, other infections can be caught more easily. For example, if you already have Chlamydia, you are more susceptible to other sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis, genital warts, herpes or HIV. You cannot get rid of some of these, even with medical treatment. However, medical treatment of virus infections can slow down the progress of the condition and relieve the symptoms.

You can protect yourself from infections and have safer sex.

A condom is a good form of protection

You yourself can reduce the risk of you or your sexual partner getting a sexually transmitted infection by using a condom. You should use a condom in all types of sex where the penis is inserted into the vagina, rectum or mouth. The condom has to stay in place throughout intercourse without sliding off or tearing. In oral sex you can also use a dental dam as protection.

The correct and consistent use of protection considerably reduces the risk of bacteria and viruses being passed on.

PROTECTION AGAINST PREGNANCY

Condoms are a good form of protection for both men and women. They prevent the spread of bacteria and viruses, including HIV. A condom also provides good protection against unwanted pregnancy. There are contraceptive pills, implants and other methods that also provide protection against pregnancy. However, they provide no protection against HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. If a condom bursts during intercourse, a woman can take emergency contraceptive pills to reduce the risk of pregnancy.

EQUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Make a habit of using a condom with temporary sexual partners or when you start a new relationship. If you start a relationship, you can use a condom together for at least three months into the relationship. During that time you can both get yourselves tested and rule out the possibility of either of you having an infection such as HIV, syphilis or chlamydia. Three months is a good period of time to get reliable results from tests for various infections.

Using protection means showing respect and consideration, both for yourself and for your sexual partner. Most people think it's positive when one partner suggests using a condom to protect both partners.

It's not just one person's responsibility to protect others from infection in sexual encounters. This responsibility is shared equally between you and the person you have sex with. So ask your partner if you forget to bring protection when you are going to have sex. It's a good idea to have several extra condoms available.

Get tested!

Several infections we describe here are listed in the Swedish Communicable Diseases and Prevention Act. This means that testing and treatment is usually free. You can also get advice and special support if you need it. By getting yourself tested you can find out whether you have an infection. In most cases you can receive treatment and get rid of the infection or the symptoms.

GET TESTED IF

- You have had unprotected sex.
- You suspect that you may be infected.
- You have symptoms that suggest you are carrying an infection.
- Your sexual partner has an infection.
- The condom you used split and you suspect that you are infected.

If you find out that you have a sexually transmitted infection, your partner will also have to be tested.

If you have had an infection, you can get tested again six months after completion of the treatment. This enables you to be more certain that you are healthy and haven't become infected again.

Finding a form of protection that suits you

- You can buy condoms in lots of places, such as supermarkets, petrol stations and pharmacies or on the Internet. Young people can get access to condoms free of charge or at a lower price at a Youth clinic, or at another clinic that treats sexually transmitted infections.
- Whether or not you are circumcised, a condom provides good protection. Condoms are available in different sizes. Experiment until you find a condom brand that suits you. Use condoms correctly and consistently.

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- Condoms are made of latex, and they are often pre-treated with lubricant. If you or your sexual partner are allergic to normal condoms, latex-free condoms are available.
- You can also buy dry condoms. For these it's a good idea to use extra water-based or silicone-based lubricant.
- Female condoms are a form of protection for women. They are similar to a normal condom and are inserted in the vagina. You can buy them on the Internet.
- A dental dam is an alternative form of protection for oral sex. This is a thin rubber or latex sheet that you can place over the vagina or anus in oral sex. They are available to buy on the Internet and in specialist shops. You can also make your own dental dam by cutting up a condom.
- It's a good idea to have several extra condoms with you when you are going to have sex.

Using protection correctly

- Handle your form of protection carefully. Teeth, pubic stubble and sharp nails can damage forms of protection. Condoms that have been exposed to sun and heat or have been kept in a wallet wear out more quickly. You should therefore replace them frequently.
- Condoms are perishable. The packaging always shows the best-before date, which you should always follow.
- Never use double condoms when you have sex. This provides no extra protection. On the contrary, there is more risk of the condom bursting.
- Men who are unfamiliar with using a condom can practice when masturbating. First pull the foreskin towards your body before you put on the condom. Squeeze the tip of the condom together when you pull it over the penis. This is because friction increases if you have air inside the top of the condom, increasing the risk of the condom tearing.
- If you are circumcised, you can put a little lubricant on the head of the penis before pulling on the condom. This can also increase pleasure. Don't use too much lubricant, however, as the condom will slide off.

- If you use a lubricant, it should be water-based or silicone-based. Lubricants containing fat or oil weaken condoms and can result in tearing.
- Always use condoms on dildos and sex toys if you share them with someone. Bacteria and viruses can be passed between you and your sexual partner when you share sex toys.

You can find more tips and advice about condoms and other subjects on some of the websites listed below.

Sex and travel

Sexually transmitted infections occur both in Sweden and in other countries. HIV and certain other infections are many times more common in other countries. Chlamydia is at least as common in Sweden as in other countries. Make a habit of always taking condoms with you when you travel in Sweden or when you go abroad.

Having unprotected sex abroad can sometimes involve more risk than having unprotected sex in Sweden, irrespective of whether you have vaginal intercourse, anal sex or oral sex. This is particularly true of tourist resorts and popular destinations, where people from many different countries meet and may have sexual contact.

Use a condom if you have vaginal intercourse, anal sex or oral sex during your trip. If you have unprotected sex with someone when you are away, you should always get tested when you come home. If you have treatment abroad for a sexually transmitted infection, you should always contact the health service and get tested when you come home. This is because you need to be sure that your infection has cleared up.

There are differences among the health services of different countries, both in and outside Europe. The possibilities for getting tested vary from country to country. Similarly, access to medicines for HIV, for example, varies. Many cases are not detected and remain untreated. Some infections may also have been treated incorrectly and not have cleared up.



Advice and testing

You can be examined or get advice at many clinics in the county where you live, for example at

- Youth clinics
- The school health service
- STI, dermatology, venereology and sexual health clinics
- Student health services
- Gynaecology clinics
- Local health centres
- Midwife clinics
- Sexual health testing clinic (Sesam)
- Communicable disease clinics

In some parts of Sweden you can order a test over the Internet to find out if you have Chlamydia. Read more on the website of your county council or your region.

CLINICS FOR GAYS, LESBIANS AND BISEXUALS

In some large cities there are special clinics for men who have sex with men. Gothenburg has "Gayhälsan". Stockholm has "Venhälsan". In Malmö the "Centrum för sexuell hälsa" has a clinic for men who have sex with men.

Special clinics for women who have sex with women are not as common. Stockholm has a gynaecological clinic for lesbian and bisexual women. The other metropolitan regions have clinics with special consulting hours specifically for women who have sex with women. Please see your county council's website for more information.

Want to know more?

If you want to find out more about condoms and dental dams, and HIV and other sexually transmitted infections there are many good websites that provide information:

FOR EVERYONE

www.1177.se (previously sjukvårdsrådgivningen.se)
www.vardguiden.se

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUNG ADULTS

www.kondom.nu
www.p-guiden.nu
www.umo.se (youth clinic on the Internet)

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

www.rfsl.se
www.rfslungdom.se
www.rfsu.se
www.hiv-sverige.se
www.noaksark.org

If you have questions about HIV and AIDS, you can contact Noaks Ark Direkt on 020-78 44 40.

At Linje 59 young gays, lesbians and bisexuals can get support and information. You can reach Linje 59 on 020-59 59 00 or www.linje59.se.

These texts were produced in 2009 by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare and the texts have been checked by HANS CARLBERG, consultant physician at Sösam, the Unit for Sexual Health at the Dermatology and Venereology Clinic, Södersjukhuset (Stockholm South General Hospital); HANS FREDLUND, Associate Professor and consultant in communicable diseases, Örebro County Council, Örebro University Hospital; LENA MARIONS, Associate Professor and consultant physician at the Gynaecology Clinic, Karolinska University Hospital.

The Swedish brochure Råd och fakta om sexuellt överförda infektioner [Advice and Facts About Sexually Transmitted Infections] (article no. 2009-126-125) can be ordered from:

Socialstyrelsens beställningsservice 120 88 Stockholm,
 Web shop: www.socialstyrelsen.se

The brochure can also be downloaded from the website of the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare www.socialstyrelsen.se

Graphic design and illustration: Infab