



Information for Patients & Caregivers

What You Need to Know About Sexually
Transmitted Infections.

Valid From: 31st March 2021

Date of Next Revision: 31st March 2023

+ SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS & DISEASES

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are caused by pathogens that spread through sexual contact.

There are two main groups of STIs.

Group I:

Primary infections caused by sexually transmitted pathogenic microorganisms.

Common sexually transmitted pathogens include:

- Parasites.
- Bacteria.
- Viruses.

Group II:

Infections caused by your own natural microorganisms. For example, 'bacterial vaginosis' is an infection of the vagina which occurs as a result of an imbalance in the normal vaginal bacteria.

BUT NOT ALL GENITAL INFECTIONS ARE TRANSMITTED SEXUALLY

Genital infections caused by some yeasts and intestinal bacteria are not sexually transmitted.

STIs that remain unnoticed and untreated at early stages may result in serious complications, such as:

- Chronic pains and aches.
- Cancers of the anus and genitalia.
- Infertility.
- Various pregnancy complications, including:
 - A pregnancy occurring outside the uterus e.g. in the fallopian tube.
 - Miscarriage.
 - Premature birth.
 - Death of the baby before birth.
- Infection of the baby at birth.

STIs CAN FACILITATE TRANSMISSION OF HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV)

If you are HIV-negative, STIs increase the risk of becoming infected with HIV.

If you are HIV-positive, STIs increase the risk of transmitting HIV to someone else.

Certain behaviours can also put you at increased risk for STIs. These include:

Beware that you are at **increased risk** for STIs if you belong to any of these groups:

- Adolescents.
- Pregnant women.
- Victims of sexual assault or abuse.
- HIV-infected individuals.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Transgender individuals.
- Sex workers.

- Having sexual activity before 25 years of age.
- Presence of new or multiple sexual partners.
- Frequent change of partners.
- Having sexual partners with STI.
- No or inconsistent condom use.
- Sexual contact with sex workers.

+ SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Clinical presentation of STIs depends on the condition and severity of the infection. Most commonly, patients with STIs also have:

- Abdominal pain or pain perceived inside the vagina or lower pelvis that occurs with deep penetration (*dyspareunia*).
- Pain or discomfort when urinating.
- Genital skin problems, such as rash, itching, blisters and sores around the genitals or anus.
- Unusual or odd-smelling discharge from the vagina, penis, or anus.
- Women can have unusual vaginal bleeding, including post-coital and inter-menstrual bleeding.
- Men can experience testicular discomfort or swelling.

+ WHAT YOUR DOCTOR NEEDS TO KNOW

You will have a one-on-one conversation with your doctor. Make sure you have an open and honest conversation with your doctor about:

- Any complaints, symptoms, or concerns about your health.
- Previous sexual contact(s) within the last three months.
- Your sexual practices.
- Ways of prevention.



+ WHAT YOUR DOCTOR WILL DO

Testing is important to ensure early detection and prompt treatment of STIs.

The doctor will examine your genitals and order tests. In addition to the usual urethral and/or vaginal swabs, you may need to have other tests:

- Testing for some bacteria requires a urine sample.
- Testing for other bacteria and viruses requires a blood sample or a swab from a sore.

In some cases, your doctor may need to discuss laboratory findings with an infectious disease specialist, dermatologist, or microbiologist. **Your name will not be disclosed if you do not wish it to be.**

NOTE:

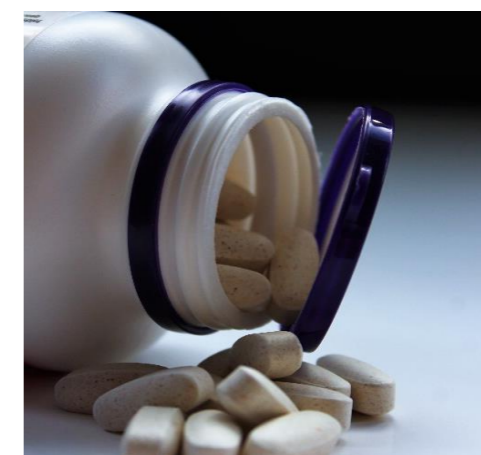
STIs can be treated or managed with follow-up care. Most STIs can be

You will be able to select a doctor of your preferred gender.

+ YOU SHOULD TRUST YOUR DOCTOR

Your doctor ensures confidentiality of the shared information, including your personal information, sexual contacts, and test results. It will remain with your doctor and will NOT be shared to anybody without your consent.

However, if your doctor suspects another person is at risk of harm, they might need to contact other healthcare services, but they will talk to you before doing this.



Testing is the only way to know for sure if you have an STI.

IF YOU TEST POSITIVE, talk to your sexual partner and any ex-partners. They might be infected and will need to get tested and treated as well.

If you are afraid to do this, your doctor can do it for you without revealing who you are.

+ TREATMENT OPTIONS

Many STIs can be cured with *antibiotics*. They must be prescribed by a healthcare specialist.

You should strictly follow the treatment plan and avoid sex until the treatment is completed. Otherwise, there is a chance of reinfection. While being treated, you can still pass the STI to others.

IMPORTANT:

TAKING ANTIBIOTICS WITHOUT A PRESCRIPTION CAN BE DANGEROUS.

Some STIs may require *anti-viral* or other medications.

Speak to your doctor if you are allergic to antibiotics or take other medications.

+ PREVENTION

Stay healthy by following these simple rules:

- **Protect yourself.** Use barrier methods of contraception (condoms).
- **Have regular testing.** It will help you to avoid complications and prevent passing the disease to your partner.
- **Get vaccinated.** Vaccines are available for some diseases.

+ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on the management of sexually transmitted infections can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) Qatar.

The guideline is available for public on the MOPH's website: www.moph.gov.qa

