



You are in control of your sexual health. Protecting yourself and preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is your responsibility. STIs can have a long term, negative impact on your health and quality of life. If you engage in any sexual activities, being safe by using condoms properly is the only way to prevent STIs and unwanted pregnancies.



**LEARN**  
about your sexual health and how to prevent STIs



**TEST REGULARLY**  
to know your STI status



**TREAT AND MANAGE**  
STIs properly

## WHAT are some common STIs?



## WHAT is a Sexually Transmitted Infection?



A sexually transmitted infection (STI) is an infection that is transmitted through sexual contact. They are transmitted through sexual intercourse, anal or oral sex, however some STIs can be transmitted during pregnancy, childbirth and/or through infected blood. Women are more likely to suffer more severe, long-term symptoms of STIs than men.

**STIs are preventable;** using condoms properly reduces your risk of STIs.

STIs can be treated, cured or managed, however they can have a long term impact on your health if not properly treated.

## HOW do I prevent STIs?



### You can reduce your risk of STIs by:



**Always using a condom properly** during any sexual activity



**For STIs such as HPV,** you can also get vaccinated

Getting tested regularly for STIs is a part of taking care of your sexual health as early detection and proper treatment can impact your life.



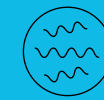
### HIV/AIDS

An infection caused by a virus that targets the immune system and weakens the body's defense against many infections. The most advanced stage of HIV infection is AIDS.



### HPV (Human papillomavirus)

A group of viruses that are extremely common worldwide. Certain types of HPV cause cervical cancer, the leading cause of cancer deaths for women in Africa.



### Syphilis

A bacterial infection that if left untreated can lead to life-threatening problems such as meningitis or blindness. Syphilis can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy or postpartum.



### Chlamydia

A common STI that can be easily prevented and treated. If left untreated, chlamydia can cause permanent damage to a woman's reproductive system.



### Genital herpes

A common STI caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). There is no cure for genital herpes, however it can be managed.



### Gonorrhea

An STI caused by bacteria called Neisseria gonorrhoeae or gonococcus. It can be passed on from mother to baby during childbirth, leading to health problems for the child.



### Trichomoniasis

An STI caused by a parasite. If left untreated, trichomoniasis can increase your risk of acquiring HIV, and can lead to other health problems.

## HOW to protect yourself using condoms

A condom is a barrier device used during sexual activity to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections and/or pregnancy. Condoms are usually made of latex or polyurethane. There are both male and female condoms.


A **male condom** is placed over an erect penis. It can be used during sexual intercourse, oral sex or anal sex to protect you and your partner by reducing risk of STIs and/or pregnancy.

**There are two types of female condoms:**


A **dental dam** is a thin, flexible sheet used between the mouth and vagina or anus during oral sex. Use a dental dam every time you have oral sex to reduce risk of STIs.


A **female condom** (internal) is worn inside the vagina during sexual intercourse to reduce risk of STIs and pregnancy. A female condom must be placed inside the vagina before any contact with the penis.


**It is important to use condoms properly for them to be effective:**

 Use a condom during any sexual activity and intercourse;


 Check the expiration date;


 Make sure there are no tears or defects;


 Do not reuse a condom;


 Do not use more than one condom at a time;

 Store condoms in a cool, dry place;

 Use latex or polyurethane condoms (lambskin condoms do not protect against STI transmission);

 If you are using lubricants, make sure they are water-based (products such as baby oil, lotion, cooking oil, petroleum jelly, etc. will cause the condom to tear or break and reduce effectiveness);

 Remove condom cautiously to avoid any contact with the fluid of your partner, for instance using a tissue;

 Dispose the condom properly

## HOW do I know if I have an STI?



### Get tested!

The only way to find out if you have an STI is to get tested. You can get tested at a hospital, a community health clinic, or a sexual health centre. Even if you are not sure if you have an STI, you should get tested. Testing regularly is an important part of taking care of your sexual health.

Some symptoms of STIs in women include:

- An unusual discharge from the vagina or anus
- Pain during sexual intercourse
- Pain or burning when peeing
- Warts, blisters or sores around genital or anus
- Lower abdominal pain
- Rash
- Lumps or skin growths around the genitals or anus
- Strong vaginal odour
- Vaginal itching or irritation
- Anal itching

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, get tested. If your results show you have an STI, be sure to properly follow the treatment prescribed or recommended by your healthcare professional or doctor.

Some STIs have no symptoms (asymptomatic) but you can still pass it on to your sexual partners, or they can pass it onto you. Get tested to find out if you have an STI. You should also get tested regularly, even if you think you do not have an STI.



[afro.who.int/PutYourselfFirst](https://afro.who.int/PutYourselfFirst)



**World Health Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Africa**

## HOW do I treat an STI?



Different STIs require different treatment. Based on your test results, your healthcare professional will recommend the correct treatment. Be sure to follow the instructions of your healthcare professional. Some STIs are easy to treat or cure. Others (such as HIV) require more long-term treatment to manage them. Follow the instructions given by your healthcare professional and take any medication prescribed.

## Talking to your partner about your sexual health



It can be nerve-wracking to talk to your partner about your sexual health, but it is important that you both get tested before engaging in any sexual activity. You can start the conversation by saying: "Let's get tested before we have sex. That way we can protect each other." or "Many people who have an STI don't know it. Why take a chance when we can know for sure?" You and your partner should also share your sexual history with each other, such as the contraception you use or would like to use (i.e. condoms), and any risk factors such as if you have had sex without a condom.