

Preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

How do I know what my sexual health status is?

Routine testing will tell you if you have a sexually transmitted infection (STI) like gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis or HIV. Some STIs do not have symptoms, so you can have them without knowing. Finding and treating an STI early has benefits:

- It reduces the chances of passing the STI on to your partner(s)
- You are less likely to develop complications like pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility from STIs, or immune system failure from advanced HIV disease
- If you have an STI, your chance of getting or passing on HIV to someone else increases. Treating STIs and HIV lessens the chance of HIV being transmitted

Exposure to an STI can happen any time you have sexual contact with another person that involves the genitals, the mouth (oral) or the rectum (anal). The more partners you have, the more likely you are to be exposed to an STI.

Talk to your health care provider about getting tested for STIs, or go to your local sexual health clinic. In some areas, you can go online to request a test for some STIs at

<https://getcheckedonline.com/Pages/default.aspx>.

Can vaccines provide protection?

Some STIs, such as hepatitis A and B, and human papillomavirus (HPV), can be prevented with vaccines. Talk to your health care provider about how to get these vaccinations.

How do I talk about prevention?

Talk to your partner(s) about preventing STIs before having oral, genital or anal sex.

- Make sure your partner(s) has been tested and treated for STIs
- Avoid sexual contact if you or your partners have symptoms of an STI, have been exposed to an STI or are being treated for an STI

- Discuss using protection, such as condoms, dental dam barriers and lubricant
- Alcohol and some prescription and illegal drugs can interfere with your ability to have a conversation and make decisions to have safer sex

If you have difficulty discussing safer sex with your partner(s), talk about it with your health care provider or counselor.

For tips on how to talk to your partner, visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource <https://smartsexresource.com/sexual-health/partners-communication/talking-to-your-partners>.

What are some important facts about condoms?

- External (“male”) condoms that prevent STIs can be made of natural (latex) or synthetic (polyurethane, nitrile, polyisoprene) rubbers. They can be used during vaginal, anal or oral sex
- Internal (“female”) condoms are made from synthetic rubbers (polyurethane, nitrile, polyisoprene). They can be used during vaginal or anal sex, but they have not been approved for anal sex
- For more information about condoms, visit Smart Sex Resource <https://smartsexresource.com/topics/condoms>
- Condoms made from lambskin or sheepskin do NOT protect against STIs
- Condoms made from rubber prevent STIs by preventing sexual and body fluids from being exchanged during sex. Synthetic rubber condoms can be used by people with latex allergies
- Condoms are less effective at protecting against STIs passed by skin-to-skin contact, such as herpes simplex virus, genital warts (human papilloma virus (HPV)) and syphilis

- Check the expiry date. Do not use a condom after its expiry date
- Use a new condom every time you have sex. Do not reuse condoms
- Store condoms at room temperature
- Keep condoms away from sharp objects, studs or piercings
- Use only water-based lubricants with external (“male”) latex condoms. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil, can weaken and destroy latex
- Water or oil-based lubricant may be used with polyurethane condoms
- Internal (“female”) and external (“male”) condoms should not be used at the same time. Using 2 condoms together may result in a condom breaking
- Condoms can have minute flaws or break during use. If a condom breaks, emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) or copper IUD (intrauterine device) can prevent pregnancy. These should be started as soon as possible. For more information, talk to your health care provider. For more information about emergency contraception, see [HealthLinkBC File #91b Emergency contraception \(EC\)](#)
- Condoms and emergency contraception are available at most pharmacies

How do I put on an external (“male”) condom?

To use an external condom, follow these steps:

1. Wash your hands
2. Carefully open the package and take the condom out. Avoid using teeth, scissors or other sharp objects, as they can damage the condom
3. Make sure that the rolled-up condom rim faces outward
4. Put the condom on the end of the penis when it is hard, erect and before any sexual touching
5. Pinch the tip of the condom to remove any trapped air and then unroll the condom to the base of the erect penis
6. After sex and before the penis becomes soft, hold the rim of the condom against the penis so

the ejaculated semen will not spill out and then carefully pull out the penis

7. Slide the condom gently off the penis, knot the open end and throw it in the garbage

How do I put on an internal (“female”) condom?

An internal condom looks like a small, clear and narrow bag. It may be inserted into the vagina or anus up to 2 hours before sex.

To use an internal condom, follow these steps:

1. Wash your hands
2. Carefully open the package and take the condom out. Avoid using teeth, scissors or other sharp objects, as they can damage the condom
3. Find a comfortable position lying down, sitting with your knees apart or standing with one foot raised on a stool
4. Squeeze the small ring between the thumb and middle finger
5. Put it into the vagina or anus as far as it will go
6. Put a finger inside the condom and push the small ring inside as far as possible. Keep the outer ring of the condom outside of the vagina or anus. The outer ring will lie flat against the body when the penis is inside the condom
7. Using lubricant with the internal condom helps to keep it in place during sex
8. When the penis goes into the vagina or anus, make sure that it goes inside the condom
9. Right after sex, remove the condom by gently twisting the outer ring to keep semen from spilling out, gently pull out the condom, making sure that no ejaculate is spilled
10. Tie it in a knot and throw it into the garbage

For more information

For more information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) Smart Sex Resource <https://smartsexresource.com>.



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/more/resources/healthlink-bc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.