

Patients' Guide to MSM and STI

- General Information
- Screening & Vaccination

What is an STI and what is MSM?

A sexually transmitted infection (STI) is an infection passed from person to person through sexual contact, either through infected body fluids or direct contact.

Anyone who has had sex or is sexually active may be at risk of contracting an STI.

According to UNAIDS, the term “men who have sex with men” (MSM) refers to males who engage in sexual activity with other males, regardless of how they identify themselves.

What are the signs and symptoms of common STIs?

Most men who contracted an STI do **not** show any symptoms. However, if one does show symptoms, one may present:

- Rectal pain, discharge, or bleeding
- Difficulty or burning pain while urinating
- Watery discharge from the penis
- Pain in the testicles
- Sores on the penis, anus, rectum, or in the mouth

Common STIs Among MSM

Chlamydia & Gonorrhoea

- Both are bacterial infections that may cause heavier yellowish discharge and/or abnormal bleeding from the genitals.
- Both infections often do not cause noticeable symptoms at all.
- If untreated, they may lead to pelvic infection, infertility or a spread in the blood to cause a more serious illness.
- Gonorrhoea and chlamydia can be treated with antibiotics.

Syphilis

- Syphilis is a bacterial infection.
- Often, syphilis has no symptoms and can only be detected on a blood test. However, if symptoms appear, individuals may experience:

Primary Stage	Secondary Stage	Tertiary Stage
Painless ulcer around the genitals and anal region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rashes on palms, soles, and body • Mouth ulcers • Hair loss 	Damage to bones, joints, blood vessels, and organs

- Most often, syphilis has no symptoms and can only be detected on a blood test.
- Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics.
- In DSC, MSM seen in the clinic have 25 times the average rate of syphilis.

Genital Herpes

- Genital herpes is a viral infection caused by the Herpes simplex virus type 1 or 2
- Painful blisters and ulcers may form on the external genitals, anus or cervix. Type 1 also causes cold sores on the lips.
- The outbreak usually lasts within 1-3 weeks.
- Genital herpes can recur but frequent episodes can be suppressed with antiviral drugs.
- Unless one has symptoms of herpes, it is **not** usually tested for.

Genital Warts

- Genital warts are a viral infection caused by Human Papillomavirus (HPV).
- In men, they may occur on the tip or shaft of the penis, the scrotum, or the anus. Women with HPV may experience small growths on the skin, which can increase in size and number.
- They can also develop in the mouth or throat of a person who has had oral sexual contact with an infected person.
- Some HPV infections can even lead to cervical, anal and genital cancers.
- A vaccine is currently available to prevent HPV infection.

Hepatitis B

- Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver which is passed through infected blood and sexual body fluids.
- Symptoms may include a flu-like illness with jaundice, but in some cases, no symptoms will appear at all. A small percentage of infected individuals may develop liver disease.

- Most people recover fully from the infection although some may become long-term carriers of the virus and infect sexual partners.
- A vaccine is available to protect individuals against the infection.

HIV

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS and can be passed through infected blood and sexual body fluids.
- Initially, HIV infection may cause no symptoms at all. However, some may experience a flu-like illness with fever, rash, swollen neck and armpit glands. These symptoms may progress to fever, weight loss, diarrhoea, night sweats, and oral thrush.
- Other skin infections may appear before a more serious illness and AIDS begin.
- Anti-HIV medications are available to control the infection and early treatment helps keep infected individuals healthy while preventing AIDS.

How can one protect themselves from STIs?

To protect yourself from STIs:

- Use condoms every time you have sex
- Attend regular STI screenings
- Get vaccinated against HPV, Hepatitis A and B
- Know your HIV status
- Get Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for protection against HIV prior to exposure
- Get Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) for protection against HIV within 72 hours after exposure

What should one do if they contracted an STI?

If one thinks they may have been exposed to STI or have any of the symptoms, one can visit the DSC Clinic for a sexual health screening.

If you have been diagnosed with any STI, avoid all kinds of sexual activity until you have completed treatment. With some types of STIs, your sexual partner(s) also need to be treated before you resume sexual activity.

Do also consume your medication consistently and as prescribed.

Screening & Vaccination

Why get screened and vaccinated?

STIs are found more frequently in sexually active MSM than in other groups.

As such, there is a dire need for MSM to protect themselves from contracting STIs to take care of the health of themselves and their loved ones.

How often should one get tested?

The DSC Clinic recommends a full STI and HIV screening at least once a year if one has 1 regular sex partner.

We recommend the screenings every 3 months if one:

- Has unprotected anal sex
- Has multiple sex partners
- Attends venues, such as saunas, where one has anonymous sex
- Uses recreational drugs during sex
- Has partner(s) who engage in the above activities

What is in an STI screening?

Blood tests

- HIV
- Syphilis
- Hepatitis A, B, C
- Herpes (HSV-1 and HSV-2)

Urine sample or throat swab or anal* swab

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhoea

Even if one does not have receptive anal sex (being the “bottom partner”), an anal swab is still recommended for MSM as one can still get an STI in the rectum through other activities, e.g. rimming (oral-anal contact), fingering, or fisting.

What vaccinations are available for MSM?

Vaccinations against Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B are strongly recommended for MSM.

Vaccination against HPV is also available and recommended for MSM who are 26 or younger.

Another preventive measure against HIV is Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). While PrEP is not a form of vaccination, it significantly reduces the chances for one to contract HIV. For more information on PrEP, you may scan the following QR code.



Reach Out to Us

If you still have queries, feel free to call us at the following numbers:

HIV/STI Hotline (8am – 5pm)

1800 252 1324

Health Info Recorded Hotline (24 hours)

+65 6295 2944

Appointments

+65 6293 9648

You may also visit www.dsc-clinic.sg for more information, or find us at the DSC Clinic, 31 Kelantan Lane #01-16 S(200031).

Disclaimer

We have attempted to provide full, accurate, and up-to-date information in this patient information leaflet, based on current medical evidence and opinion. However, information and advice may vary from different sources and over time. If you have any further questions, do see your doctor or healthcare provider.

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