

Key aspects briefly summarized

- STIs are a common health problem worldwide and can be managed through safer sex, regular testing and treatment.
- If you have had a risk situation, it is important to consult a health care professional as soon as possible to discuss whether HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) should be given to prevent contracting HIV.
- After a high-risk situation, you are advised to get tested for STIs even if you have no symptoms.

Enjoying your sexuality freely and responsibly is part of a healthy life. Knowing how to take care of yourself and others is especially important when you are in new situations – like during travel.

Travelers who engage in casual sex tend to be at higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Being abroad, while also meeting new people, can involve behaving differently and taking more risks than you would at home. It is important to know that certain practices – such as unprotected sex and/or having multiple new sexual partners – can significantly increase the risk for STIs. Some STIs can cause serious complications in some circumstances and can also be transmitted to additional partners if not diagnosed and treated in time. If you are not sure whether you are at risk, Love Life's '[Risk Check](#)' can help.

Infections

STIs are infections that are transmitted through sexual contact (vaginal, anal, or oral sex). They are caused by more than 30 different bacteria, viruses, or parasites. It is also possible for more than one STI to be transmitted at the same time. Some of the most significant STIs are HIV, hepatitis B, human papillomavirus (HPV), herpes simplex (HSV), syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhea.

Occurrence / Risk areas

Most STIs occur **worldwide** and can affect anyone and everyone, regardless of age, gender or sexual orientation. Some STIs are more common in specific regions of the world or in certain demographic groups. For example: HIV in women living in sub-Saharan Africa or gonorrhea in men who have sex with men (MSM) in Western Europe.

Transmission

STIs are usually transmitted through unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex. However, they can also be passed on through other intimate contacts, for example HSV and HPV, which are transmitted through skin contact/kissing or sharing sex toys. Others can also be transmitted by non-sexual means, such as blood contact or needle sharing. Many STIs – including syphilis, hepatitis B, HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, and HPV – can also be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy and childbirth. The Zika virus can also be transmitted through sexual contact even after a trip, which is why you should seek advice if you are planning a pregnancy.

Symptoms

- Burning or itching in the genital area
- Painful or frequent urination or pain in the lower abdomen
- Pain or soreness with bowel movements.
- Unusual discharge from the penis, anus or vagina
- Sores, redness, blisters or warts in the mouth/lips or genital area
- In some cases fever

Important: STIs can also occur without any or only mild symptoms. Even if you are not aware of it, you can infect others. Even if you have no symptoms, you should consult your doctor if you have had unprotected sex with a new partner or multiple partners. This is because early detection and treatment are important to prevent transmission and complications from untreated STIs.

Diagnosis

STIs can be diagnosed during a physical exam or by examining urine, a sore, a blister, or a swab from the vagina, penis, throat or anus. Blood tests can help with certain diagnosis (hepatitis A, B and C, HIV and syphilis).

The timing of testing is important, as some infections may not be detectable immediately after exposure (diagnostic window). To rule out an infection, **HIV and syphilis** should usually be tested at least **6 weeks** after the sexual contact. In the case of **chlamydia and gonorrhea**, testing should be done at least **2 weeks** after the contact. This applies only if there are no symptoms. Take also into consideration that access to reliable testing and treatment may be limited in some destinations.

FACTHSHEET

STIs - SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

When to get tested?

- If you are experiencing symptoms (see above)
- If you have multiple sexual partners, it's recommended to do an STI-Check at least once a year.
- If you belong to a demographic group with a higher STI-risk. For example, MSM or sex workers and their clients
- If a sexual partner has been recently diagnosed with an STI
- Returning from travel if you had a high-risk contact
- At the beginning of a new monogamous relationship

Treatment

Most STIs are curable; however, others, such as HIV, are not curable but can be effectively managed with lifelong medication. This treatment prevents complications and allows people living with HIV to lead normal lives. Bacterial STIs – such as syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhea – can be treated and cured with antibiotics. Early treatment reduces the risk of complications. This is because, if left untreated, some STIs may lead to long-term health problems, such as infertility, ectopic pregnancies, birth defects, and certain types of cancer. Regular sexual partners should also be treated at the same time to prevent re-infection (ping-pong effect).

Prevention

Before you travel:

- Consider STI screening if you have had recent risk exposure
- Ensure vaccinations are up to date (hepatitis B, HPV and depending on sexual practices hepatitis A and mpox)
- Discuss **HIV-PrEP** with a healthcare provider if appropriate

During travel:

- Follow [Love Life](#)'s **safer sex** rules.
- Carry condoms from reliable sources, as quality or availability may vary in some destinations.
- Remember that **oral sex** can also lead to transmission of STIs.
- If you have had a high-risk situation, it is important to consult a health care professional as soon as possible to discuss whether **HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** should be given to prevent HIV infection. **HIV PEP is most effective when given early i.e. within first hours after exposure** (max 48 hours after contact).
- Remember that alcohol or drugs may lead to increased risk behavior.
- Remember that you can infect another person/known partner during sex if you have an untreated STI.
- People with a newly diagnosed STI are encouraged to inform their former sexual partners so that they can also be treated.
- Even without symptoms, screening is recommended after risk exposure.

Further Information

- Love Life: www.lovelife.ch
- Sexual Health Switzerland: www.sexuelle-gesundheit.ch
- Hepatitis Switzerland: <https://en.hepatitis-schweiz.ch/all-about-hepatitis/what-is-hepatitis>
- World Health Organization (WHO). Factsheets. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs). 20.12.2025: [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-\(stis\)](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-(stis))