

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED AND BLOOD-BORNE INFECTIONS (STBBIS)

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sometimes called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), can affect the general health, well-being and reproductive potential of those infected. Participation in sexual risk behaviours can increase your chances of getting an STI. Sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) include chlamydia, gonorrhoea, infectious syphilis, hepatitis C virus, human papilloma virus (or genital warts) (HPV), herpes and HIV.

These infections spread quickly and their incidence is rising steadily. Some infected individuals remain symptomless and can therefore unknowingly pass on their disease. STBBIs can have serious consequences: infertility, cancer, chronic stomach pains, infection of newborns, anxiety, etc.

There are several ways to protect yourself when you have sex with a partner. For information on the most effective methods, speak to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Protection and prevention

- Use a condom whenever your sex relations involve penile penetration of the anus, vagina or mouth.
- Reduce the number of your sexual partners.
- Never share drug injection equipment.
- Be tested regularly.
- Use pre-exposure prophylaxis¹.
- Use post-exposure prophylaxis².

1 Pre-exposure prophylaxis is an effective method to protect against HIV for people at high risk of exposure. Although this preventive treatment does not protect against other STBBI, it significantly reduces the risks of getting HIV infection. For more information, [go to maprep.org](http://go.to/maprep.org).

2 Post-exposure prophylaxis is highly recommended to prevent HIV infection following exposure to the virus. Treatment absolutely must begin within 72 hours following exposure, in an emergency department or a sexual health clinic.

Getting tested

The first step is to see a health professional, who will arrange for a screening test and explain the next steps if the test result is positive. You should also notify your partners.

Screening tests

Screening tests for sexually transmitted or blood-borne infections (STBBIs) are performed by authorized health and social service network professionals to detect a STBBI in symptom-less individuals.

These tests are usually done using a sample of:

- Blood
- Genital secretions or
- Urine

Some infections such as herpes and condylomas cannot be usefully diagnosed by blood testing; they are diagnosed by a doctor on the basis of the patient's answers to questions and an examination of the lesions.

When should you have a screening test?

You should ask for a STBBI screening test:

- After engaging in any at-risk sexual behaviour without a condom;
- After sharing a needle or injection equipment;
- If you are in a stable couple and would like to stop using condoms; or
- If you are a woman who is considering getting pregnant.

What should you do if you test positive?

- Make a doctor's appointment for a medical examination.
- Notify your partners.
- Abstain from having sex until a follow-up test has confirmed that you are cured (if your infection is curable) or use a condom whenever your sexual relations involve penile penetration of the anus, vagina or mouth.
- Have a follow-up test after your treatment (if your infection can be treated).
- Discuss protective measures to take with your partners when you have sex in the future.

What should you do if you test negative?

The first thing to remember is that several weeks can go by between the time of infection and the time when the infection will show up in a positive test result.

Informing your partners

Your partners need to be informed as soon as possible, and they need to be treated even if they have no symptoms and test negative.

Which partners do you need to inform?

Depending on the STI you have contracted, you may need to inform the partners you have had sex with in the last three months, or in the last few years.

How to communicate?

If you feel you need help getting up your courage and finding the right words, it might be useful:

- to talk to a friend or a doctor about the best way to inform your partners; and
- practice what you are going to say before speaking to them.

You can give your partners a brochure on your STI so that they can get their own information and find out where they can be tested and treated in their neighbourhood.

Telling your partners will not be easy, and you may find yourself saying:

- "I don't know which partners to talk to."
- "I'm too embarrassed and I'm afraid of their reaction."
- "I never want to see or talk to that person again."
- "I don't know how to get a hold of him/her."
- "I told the person but I wasn't able to convince him/her to see a doctor."

Your doctor or nurse can help you identify the partners you need to inform and make suggestions as to the best way to proceed.

Most places in Québec have a public health professional specialized in STIs who can help you find ways to talk to your partners, and who can contact them confidentially, without revealing your identity as the infected person.

Help and Resources

STBBI testing

Where can I get information to get tested for STBBIs?

If you have any questions about STBBI testing, you can contact:

- Your doctor or nurse
- Info -Santé, 811
- [Map of testing services on Québec's HIV/AIDS website](#)

People at Risk

The current recommendation is that the following people be tested:

- people who have a partner who has a STBBI
- men who have sex with men
- people who share injection equipment
- people who have had sex with a partner returning from a country where STIs and HIV are endemic
- people who have sex with a partner coming from a country where STIs and HIV are endemic
- sex workers and their clients or partners
- pregnant women

If any of these people have unprotected oral or genital sex with several partners, they should be tested every three to six months.

SIDEP+ clinic

See information about the SIDEP+ clinic for men who have sex with men (MSM) but not for everyone at risk.