



## Sex is part of your life-make it part of your conversations, too!

### Can STDs be transferred through oral sex?

They sure can. Although oral sex is often considered “safer” than vaginal or anal intercourse, it is still possible for STDs to be transmitted. You can make oral sex even safer by using a latex condom or dental dam, which is a latex rectangle that can be placed between the mouth and the vagina, vulva, or anus.

### How soon can I be tested after having un-protected sex?

If you think you’ve been exposed to an STD, go to your health care provider to get tested. Sometimes symptoms of an STD will show up just a couple of days after becoming infected, and sometimes it can take months. If you think you may have been exposed, it is very important to not engage in sexual activity until you are tested and treated, if necessary. Remember, many infections do not cause any symptoms but they can still be transmitted to another person during sex. If you believe you may be at risk for having an infection, get tested.

### Which STDs are curable?

There are approximately 30 STDs that have been identified throughout the world. Some can be cured with prescription medication and others remain in the body and are currently considered not curable, including HIV. All STDs can be treated, meaning that any uncomfortable symptoms, such as herpes sores, can usually be helped through medication or certain procedures. To see a full [list of STDs](#) and learn how each is treated, pull back the covers on our [Uncovering STDs](#) tool.

### Can I get an STD from a toilet seat?

No. STDs/STIs are transmitted from one infected person to another during vaginal, anal or oral sex or through intimate sexual contact (i.e., hand jobs, genital-to-genital contact without penetration, etc.) The only other way that STDs can be transmitted is from an infected pregnant woman to her fetus or baby during childbirth. Some infections, such as Hepatitis B and HIV are sexually transmitted but can also be transmitted from an infected person to another through direct blood-to-blood contact (i.e. sharing an intravenous needle).

### What should I do if I think I have an STD?

First off, don’t panic. You should go see a medical provider and get tested right away. It’s also a good idea to hold off on having sexual contact with anyone until you know for sure what is going on and whether or not you have a STD. You can find a health center location in your neck of the woods by visiting our [Health Center Locator](#).

People with multiple sexual partners, those who think they may have been exposed, those who’ve had unprotected sex with a partner whose health status was unknown, or anyone who has symptoms of an STD should definitely get tested. It’s the first crucial step on the road to proper treatment.

### Is every STD testable?

*Yes. There are tests available for all STDs, except for HPV in men. There are different tests for different STDs, but most are simple and non-invasive. The tests can range from blood or urine samples to vaginal swabs or small samples taken from the infected site.*

## How do I know if I have an STD?

The only way to know for sure if you have an STD is to visit a health care provider and get tested. If you believe you may have been exposed or contracted an STD, you can learn about the symptoms, treatment and other details in our STD tool. Knowing that info is helpful, but to know for sure go ahead and get tested at a friendly site – check out Friendly health services directory.

## What's the best way to prevent spreading or getting an STD/STI?

As with all STDs/STIs, the most effective protection is to abstain from sexual activity or be monogamous with one-long-term partner who has tested negative. Using latex condoms (male or female) or dental dams can significantly reduce the risk of contracting or spreading an infection. Using a water-based lubricant is A-OK, but don't use anything with oils in it because it can make the condom ineffective. There are some STDs, like herpes and HPV that condoms are less effective at preventing (good reminder for guys and gals to get the HPV vaccine).

## For the Dudes

*What could cause my testicles to hurt? As far as STDs are concerned, this uncomfortable symptom most likely may be due to Chlamydia or gonorrhea.*

*For both of these infections, your testicles may swell and become sore, which is an effect called epididymitis, but this isn't a super common symptom for either infection. Other reasons for testicular pain may be injury or trauma, a urinary tract infection or a non-sexually transmitted bacteria or virus like mumps. No matter what, if you have pain down there, especially if you don't know what's causing it, see a health care provider ASAP.*

- *What does it mean if my penis is discolored or has bumps?*

*Bumps and discoloration around the penis aren't exactly symptoms someone would*

## What is an STD vs. an STI?

The difference, really, is in the terminology itself. Way back in the day, sexually transmitted infections were called “venereal diseases,” believed to have been so-called after the Goddess of Love, Venus.

Today, professionals use the terms STD (sexually transmitted disease) or STI (sexually transmitted infection) to discuss infections that are transmitted from one infected person to another through vaginal, anal or oral sex or through close intimate sexual contact. Using either STD or STI is accurate, however more and more “STI” is being used as the most up-to-date term. The reason for this is that people can have an infection without it actually turning into a disease. Just like HIV and AIDS.

## The Signs and Symptoms of STDs

“How can I tell if I have an STD?” Wow, that's a loaded question. We get lots of Before players asking us about certain symptoms and if they might be the signs of an STD/STI. Unfortunately there's not always an easy answer. Each STD is different and has its own set of indicators, but many common symptoms can apply to any number of these sexually transmitted infections.

While we definitely can't go over every single possible STD symptom, there are a couple of frequently asked guy-focused, gal-focused and everybody focused questions we'd like to cover right here and right now.

*look forward to—particularly when they're painful. STD-wise, these particular symptoms could be caused by sypphilis, scabies, public lice (aka “crabs”), molluscum contagiosum, genital warts or herpes. Other causes could be everything from skin irritation and temperature change to razor burn, ingrown hairs or clogged pores. Best thing to do? Again, see a health care provider. The sooner you're diagnosed, the better off you'll be, especially in the case of an STD.*

### For the Ladies

- **Does vaginal discharge mean I have an STD?**

No, not necessarily. Regular vaginal mucus is totally natural and is helpful in keeping the vagina lubricated and protected from infection. When discharge changes color, changes texture or become odorous, then you may be looking at something more serious. The most common STD culprits for abnormal vaginal discharge include **Chlamydia** and **gonorrhea**, but almost all sexually transmitted infections have the potential to cause this symptom. That's why it's really important to see your **health care provider** right away if you're experiencing unusual vaginal discharge of any kind.

- **Do I have an STD if I have vaginal dryness?**

Nope. Some women are just dryer "down south" and vaginal dryness is not a common symptom of STDs, so your lack of lubrication likely doesn't mean you have an infection. Sometimes vaginal dryness can come from fear or nervousness before sex and some women just tend to be drier than others, but that can be fixed with some simple store-bought lube. Not only does lube make sex go more smoothly, it also helps protect you against STDs. You see, if you're not naturally wet or using a lubricant when you have sex, the risk of tissue tearing (both in the vagina and the anus) goes up, and these tiny tears can up your chance of contracting an STD if your partner is infected.

### For Everyone

- **My pubic hair itches. Do I have an STD?**

Maybe. Maybe not. Those uncomfortable-to-have-and-even-more-uncomfortable-to-scratch itches in the pubic area could be caused by several factors. On the STD front, **scabies**, **public lice** (aka "crabs") and **herpes** are the top offenders. But, your itch may be a whole different situation. Could be razor burn. Could be dry skin. Could be an allergic reaction to a product or lotion. But no matter what, if the itching is prolonged, gets worse or is accompanied by sores or pain, make an appointment with your health care provider or visit a **clinic** right away.

## Is Swallowing Semen Bad for Me?

Performing oral sex on a male partner typically has the same, familiar outcome as other kinds of sex: out comes the cum. For some couples, the performing partner will swallow his or her partner's semen, and some people wonder what the health benefits and risks of "the big gulp" might be.

Frankly, as long as you're in a healthy, trusting relationship and you have both tested negative for any **STDs**, there is nothing in semen that is either harmful or beneficial to your health when swallowed. When a guy cums, he produces about a teaspoon of fluid, which includes sperm (of course), protein, enzymes, fructose and mucus. Semen's not fattening or high in calories—there are only about 5 calories in the typical ejaculation—and there is no substantial nutritional value in there either. ***Honestly, that whole myth about cum being "high in protein" has got to stop.***

Just because it comes from a human body doesn't mean it has anywhere near enough protein to give you an energy boost. Though, to be fair, you may experience feelings of high-energy exhilaration simply because you're having some safe and frisky fun between the sheets. The important thing to remember is that oral sex can transmit STDs just as easily as intercourse. If you are hooking up with a new partner and are unsure if he or she has been tested, the first step is to *talk about it, and use protection.*

*Diving into conversation and getting the answers you need to feel comfortable is important.* Beyond that, condoms are a great way to protect yourself and your partner. There are lots of interesting, flavored varieties that are specifically designed to keep you safe during oral sex. So if you're not interested in swigging down your partner's semen, feel free to spit it out afterwards or catch it in a condom before it even hits your tongue.

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