Sexually transmitted infections (STI)

What are they?

They are infections which are transmitted by sexual contact, vaginal, oral or anal. Some of them can equally be transmitted by:

- blood,
- kissing, touching,
- by the mother to her infant child during pregnancy, childbirth or breast-feeding.

Caught in time, the majority of these infections can be treated. If neglected, they can have serious consequences (e.g. cancer, sterility) and strongly increase the risk of VIH/AIDS.

What are these infections?

They are transmitted by:

- bacteria: chlamydia, blennorrhoea (gonorrhoea, « clap »), infection with gardnerella vaginalis, syphilis, venereal lymphogranulomatoses (VD)
- virus: human papilloma virus (HPV), genital warts, herpes, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS
- fungus: mycosis (candida)
- parasite: trichomoniasis, scabies, crabs (pubic lice). Some infections are benign others are more serious.

Symptoms not to be overlooked

- Bumps, blisters, genital or anal warts.
- Itching, irritations, redness, burning sensation on genital organs.
- Unusual vaginal loss and/or unpleasant smells, flow of pus, even low, from the glans.
- Burning sensation when urinating.
- Unusual heavy bleeding, even small amount (outside a woman’s menstruation).
- Pain diffused in lower abdomen (not related to a woman’s menstruation).
- Pain and burning sensation during sexual intercourse.
- Fever, tiredness, jaundice, digestive disorders.
- Redness of palate and the throat.

These symptoms can be discrete, even absent, in either the woman or the man!

How to protect yourself...

... during all new relationships,
... change of partner,
... if you have several partners or no stable partners,
... outside of a stable relationship based on confidence,
... and this applies regardless of the method of contraception used by the woman.

- The best way to protect yourself from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections is to practise safer sex:
  1. Always use a condom, male or female, for penetrative sex (vaginal or anal sex).
  2. For more personal sexual advice, do the safer sex check on www.lovelife.ch.
- Vaccinate yourself when the opportunity arises (Hepatitis B, human papilloma virus HPV).
- Get tested if you have taken any risks or if you notice any symptoms from the above infections. Do not ignore
them and hope they go away!
Tests can be taken by blood tests, samples (urine, cervix, vaginal secretions, or cuts) or other medical and gynaecological examinations.

Information for women: These tests are not covered during normal gynaecological examinations, talk to your doctor if you think you are at risk!

How to avoid them being transmitted

If your doctor has diagnosed you with one of these infections, inform your partner or partners so that they can consult their doctor even if they appear not to have any symptoms.

Avoid having sexual intercourse during the entire time of treating the infection.

2018, SANTÉ SEXUELLE SUISSE, Fondation suisse pour la santé sexuelle et reproductive; ALECCS Association suisse latine des spécialistes en santé sexuelle, Éducation – Formation – Conseil; faseg, Fachverband sexuelle Gesundheit in Beratung und Bildung