

STIs: What they are, & where to go to be screened

Crabs are meant for the beach. Don't be a fool - just cover your tool.

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How to introduce STIs, or Sexually Transmitted Infections? Well, they are not pleasant. They journey from body to body through unprotected sex (when a condom isn't used), some can be cured and some are with you for life, and they can all be stopped by wearing a condom! Do you fancy contracting one? No, we don't either... There are approximately 30 known STIs now, but some are far more popular than others. Let us take you on the STI pit stop tour:



Chlamydia

The most common STI in the UK, Chlamydia is easily caught but fortunately also easily cured with an antibiotic treatment from the doctors. However, the real downside? As many as 70% of people contract Chlamydia without any symptoms, and live with it for years without knowing they have it. Scary, hey?

If any symptoms do occur, it might be abnormal discharge from the penis or vagina, bleeding, or pain whilst urinating or having sex. It's tragic that Chlamydia can cause infertility in both men and women if left untreated, so whilst it is easy to treat, it could leave you unable to have children if you don't know you have it. Definitely worth wearing a condom for if you ask us!

Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia sometimes come in pairs. Approximately a third of women infected with gonorrhoea also have chlamydia. You can only catch Gonorrhoea through sexual activity, and the same symptoms of irregular discharge from the penis or vagina apply. Just like Chlamydia, symptoms aren't always there, but the female reproduction system, in particular, can be damaged by Gonorrhoea. If men are left untreated, the bacteria from Gonorrhoea can spread to the rest of the body, often infecting the skin or muscle joints. Gonorrhoea can be treated with antibiotics, like Chlamydia.



Genital Warts

Genital warts appear around the genitals or anus as little bumps that sometimes form clusters with a cauliflower shape, and can be itchy or painful. They can be treated with anything from creams to surgery, and although they are not dangerous, they are easily transmitted and need speedy treatment.

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus

Most of us have heard of HIV as it is so serious. It is caused by a virus that attacks your immune system. Many people die from this virus eventually, once HIV has merged into AIDS – the Acquired Immunodeficiency Symptom (when your immune system is giving up).

HIV can be caught through blood exchange (for example, sharing needles) or sex. It can also be given to a new-born by a pregnant woman who has the virus. The initial symptoms of HIV can be flu-like, with possible sickness and diarrhoea. A fever can then develop. It may take up to 10 years before the infected person contracts AIDS, but there is no cure at all (although getting treated early can slow down the process). When you have HIV, you are classed as HIV-positive, and there are over 8000 people who are HIV-positive in the UK.



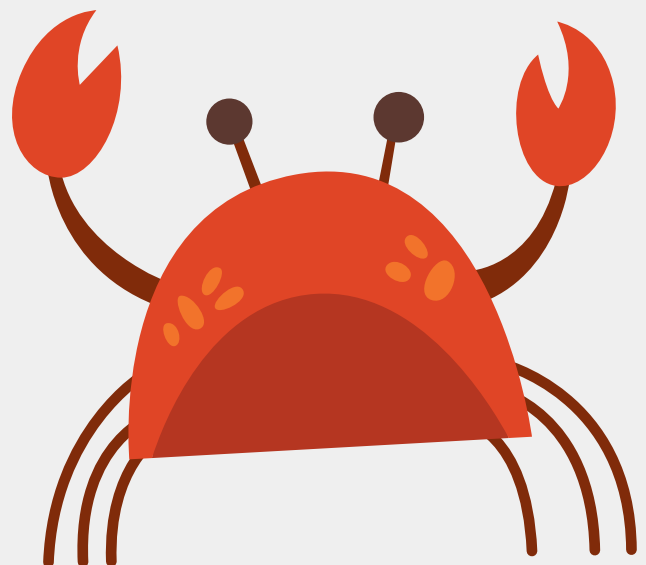
Crabs

Crabs, or pubic lice, aren't technically an STI, just tiny bugs that live in your pubic hair and move around if there's another pubic area nearby... Symptoms are swollen, itchy genitals, but fortunately they can be removed with special medical shampoos.

If something doesn't look or feel right: If you have lumps, bumps or abnormal discharge coming from your genitals, you might have an infection that isn't an STI but needs checking out. There's no shame in this, and it's better to be safe than sorry.

Visiting an STI clinic

So many young people feel that something is not right with their 'bits', but they are too embarrassed to go and see someone about it. Our advice? GO! Half an hour of awkwardness is much more bearable than infertility or a serious illness. Sometimes, STI clinics are just 'drop-in', so you don't even need to make an appointment. And, you know what? The staff have seen it all before and will do everything they can to put you at ease. The service is totally confidential, even if you are under 16, the legal age of sexual consent, and you are welcome to go whatever your symptoms may be.



If you have a disability: It is so important that you are using contraception that suits you and your lifestyle, remembering to use it and ensuring that you use condoms when you have sex in order to really reduce the risk of catching STIs. Depending on your condition, treatment may be different for you if you are taking certain medications, for example. Be aware of this, and stay safe! STIs are a serious business, so talk to your GP or head to a sexual health clinic if you want to know any more. The professionals will be more than happy to help and it's nothing to be ashamed of; in fact, take pride in the fact that you want to look after yourself!

Extra support

Feel free to contact Mik or Emily at The Love Lounge:

www.enhancetheuk.org/enhance/the-love-lounge

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