



**Developmental
Disabilities
Planning Council**

Easy Read Edition

A Self-Advocate's Guide to Safer Sex

Part 4: What are STIs? How can you prevent STIs?



Part 4: What are STIs? How can you prevent STIs?

Sexually transmitted infections are germs you can get from having sex.



Sexually transmitted infections are also called STIs.



Some people call sexually transmitted infections "sexually transmitted diseases," or STDs.

What kinds of STIs are there?

Here is a list of some common STIs:

Chlamydia



Chlamydia is an STI.



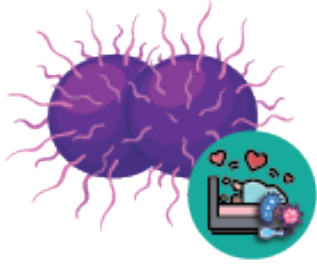
Many times, people who have chlamydia have no symptoms.



They might not know they have an STI.



Chlamydia can be cured with medication.



Gonorrhea

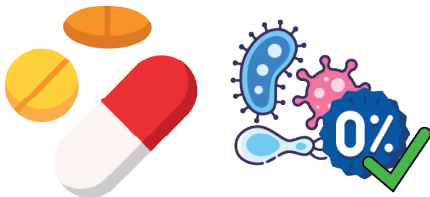
Gonorrhea is an STI.



Many times, people who have gonorrhea have no symptoms.

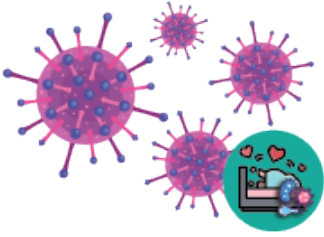


They might not know they have an STI.



Gonorrhea can be cured with medication.

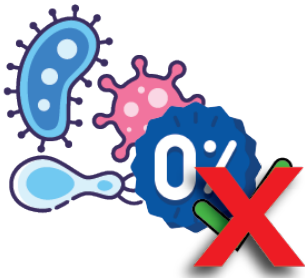
Herpes



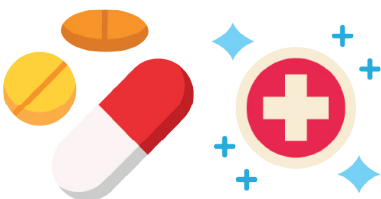
Herpes is an STI that causes sores on the genitals.



The germ that causes herpes is related to the germ that can cause cold sores in your mouth.

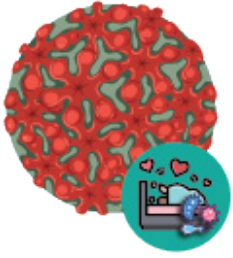


There is no cure for herpes.

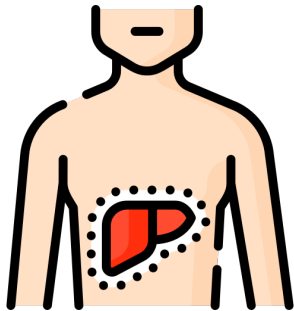


But herpes can be treated with medications.

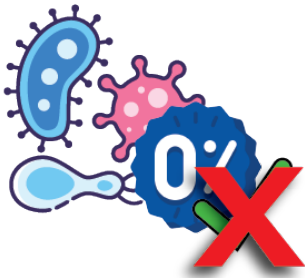
Hepatitis B



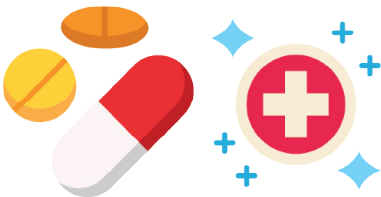
Hepatitis B is an STI that can hurt your liver.



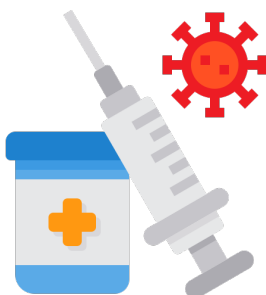
Your liver is an organ in your body.



There is no cure for hepatitis B.

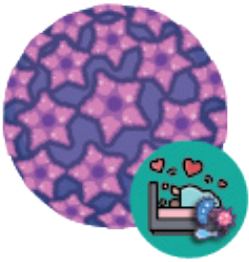


But hepatitis B can be treated with medication.



And hepatitis B can be prevented with a vaccine.

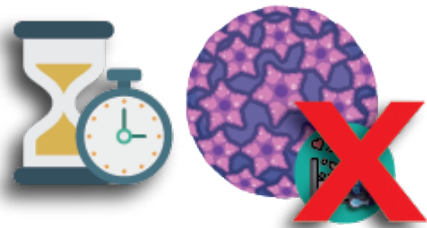
HPV



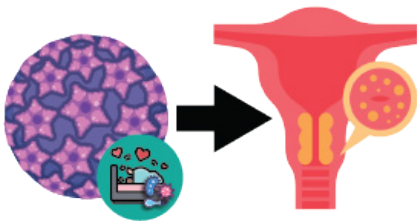
HPV is an STI that causes warts on the genitals.



Most types of HPV are harmless.



Most types of HPV will go away on their own.



However, some types of HPV can cause cancer.

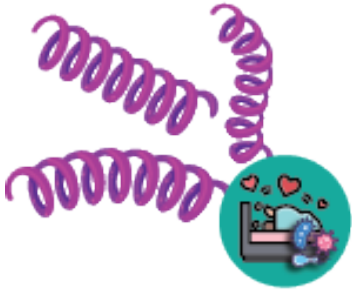


There is no cure for HPV.

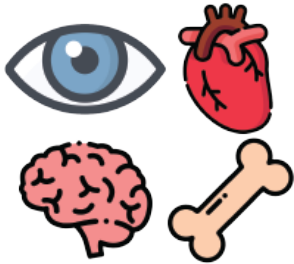


But HPV can be prevented with a vaccine.

Syphilis



Syphilis is an STI that causes sores on the genitals.

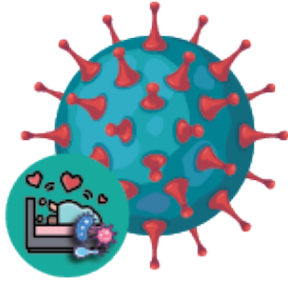


Syphilis can cause damage to other parts of your body if you do not get it treated.

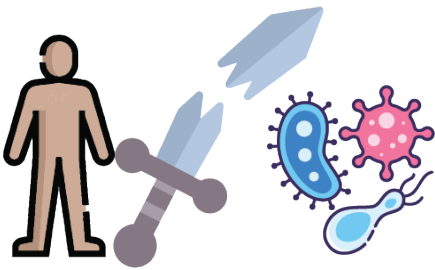


Syphilis can be cured with medication.

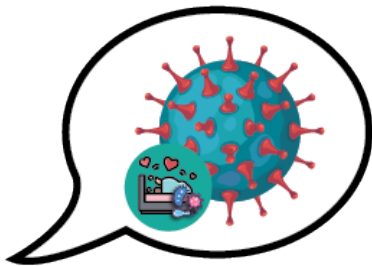
HIV



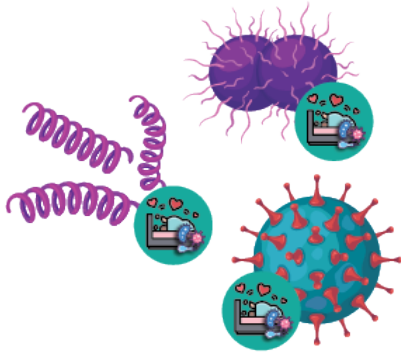
HIV is an STI.



It is a germ that makes it hard for your body to fight off other germs.



We will talk more about HIV in Part 5, "What is HIV? What is AIDS? How can you prevent HIV and AIDS?"



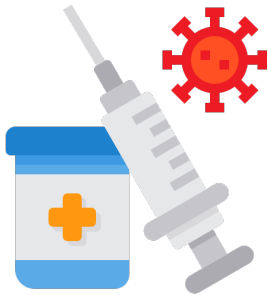
There are other STIs but these are the most common.

Prevention of STIs



There are ways to prevent yourself from getting STIs.

The two main ways are:

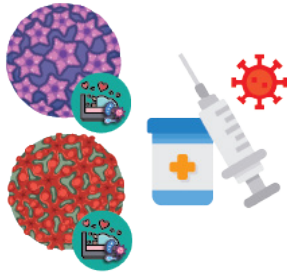


- Vaccines

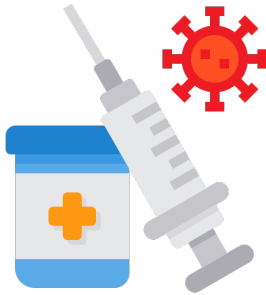


- Condoms and Barrier Methods

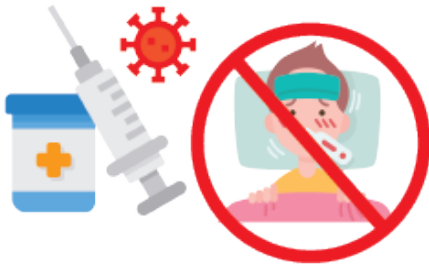
Vaccines for STIs



There are two STIs that we can stop with a vaccine.

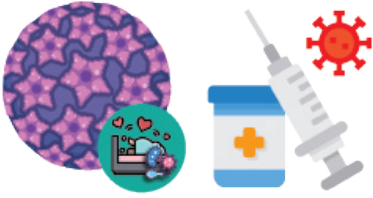


Vaccines are shots.



Doctors give us vaccines to keep us from getting sick.

HPV



We can stop HPV with a vaccine.



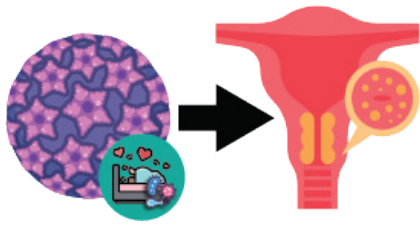
People usually get the HPV vaccine as teenagers.



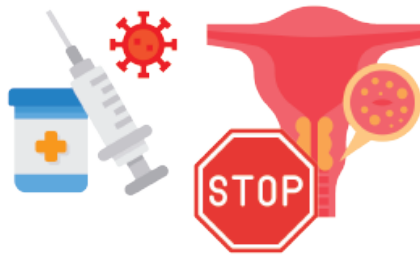
But if you did not get the HPV vaccine as a teenager, you might be able to still get it as an adult.



The HPV vaccine is important because it can stop you from getting HPV.

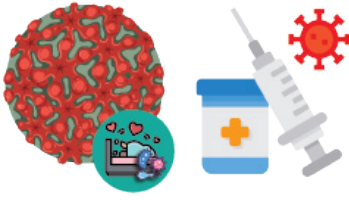


HPV can cause cancer.

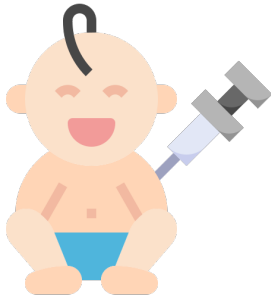


So the HPV vaccine can stop you from getting cancer.

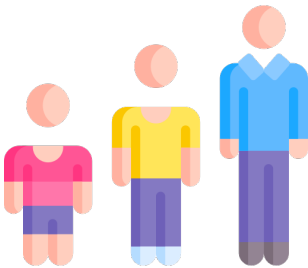
Hepatitis B



We can stop hepatitis B with a vaccine.



People usually get the hepatitis B vaccine as babies.



But you can get the hepatitis B vaccine at any age.



The hepatitis B vaccine is important because it can stop you from getting hepatitis B.



Hepatitis B can hurt your liver.

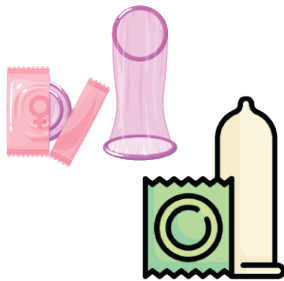


So the hepatitis B vaccine can stop you from getting liver damage.

Condoms and Barriers



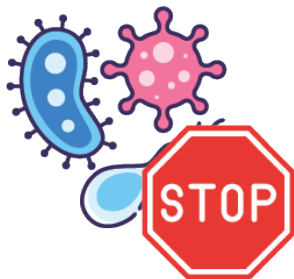
Using a condom is a good way to help keep you from getting or giving STIs.



Both internal and external condoms can stop you from getting STIs.



Condoms are a type of barrier.



A barrier is a physical piece of material that can stop you from getting germs that cause STIs.

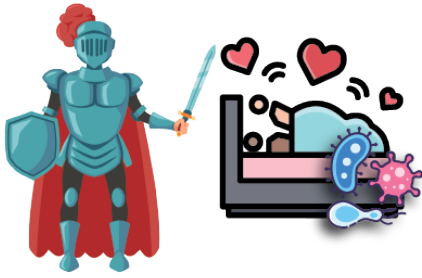
There are two main types of barriers besides condoms:



- Dental dams

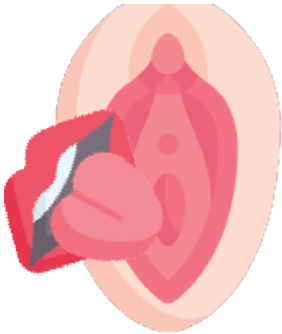


- Gloves



Dental dams

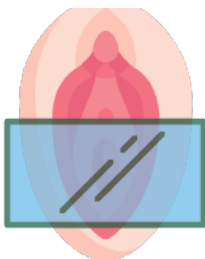
Dental dams are another way to protect yourself against STIs.



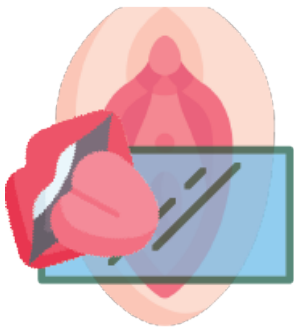
Dental dams especially work well if you are having mouth-to-vagina oral sex or vagina-to-vagina sex.



Dental dams are thin sheets of flexible material, usually rubber latex.



You put the dental dam over the opening of the vagina.



The dental dam is a barrier between the vagina and the mouth or the other vagina.



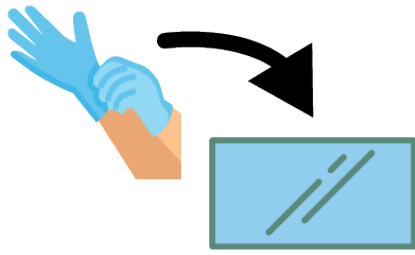
Dental dams can stop the germs that cause STIs.



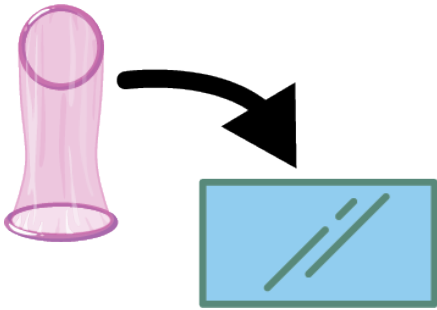
Note: Most dental dams are made out of rubber latex.



If you are allergic to latex, it might be hard to find dental dams without latex.



But you can make a dental dam out of a disposable glove made of a different material, like nitrile.



You can also make a dental dam out of a non-latex condom.

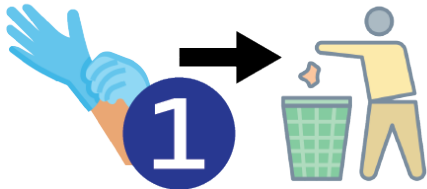


You can read about how to make dental dams out of other barriers in this article on "[Do-It-Yourself Dental Dams](#)."

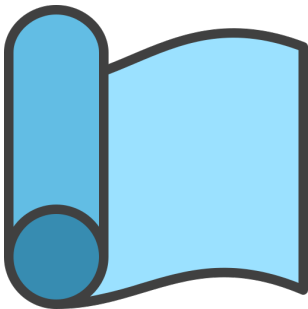


Gloves

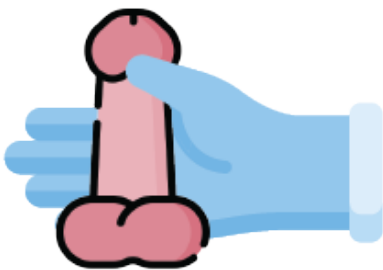
Disposable gloves are another way to protect yourself against STIs.



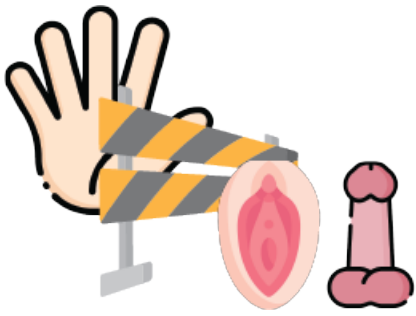
Disposable gloves are gloves you can throw away after using them once.



Disposable gloves are usually made out of nitrile, a thin, flexible material.



You can use disposable gloves if you are having fingers-to-genitals sex.



Disposable gloves are a barrier between the fingers and the genitals.

Testing for STIs



You can get tested for STIs.

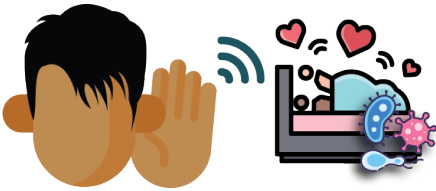


When you get tested for STIs, you get checked for the germs that cause STIs.

You should generally get tested for STIs:



- About once per year if you are having sex, especially if you do not use condoms or other barriers



- If you find out someone you had sex with has an STI



- Before having sex with a new partner

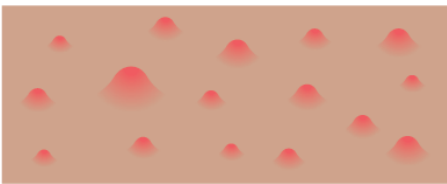


- If you have symptoms of an STI

Here are some common symptoms of STIs:



- Sores in or on your genitals (sexual body parts), thighs, or butt



- Bumps or rashes in or on your genitals (sexual body parts), thighs, or butt



- Bad-smelling or weirdly colored fluid coming out of your vagina or penis



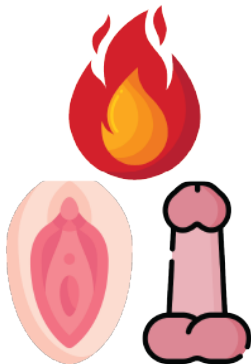
- Burning when you urinate (pee)



- Having to urinate a lot



- Itching in your genitals



- Burning in your genitals



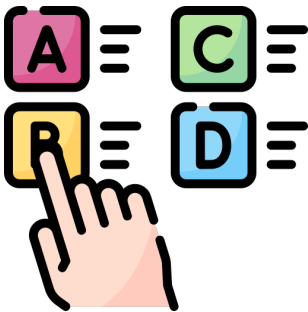
- Pain in your genitals



Remember, a lot of STIs have no symptoms.



So it is important to get tested for STIs even if you have no symptoms.



[Here is a quiz](#) that can tell you if you should get tested for STIs.

How can I get tested for STIs?



You can get STI testing from your doctor or health care provider.



You can also get STI testing from a sexual health clinic, like [Planned Parenthood](#).

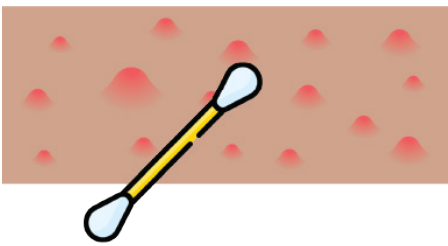


There are different ways you can be tested for STIs.

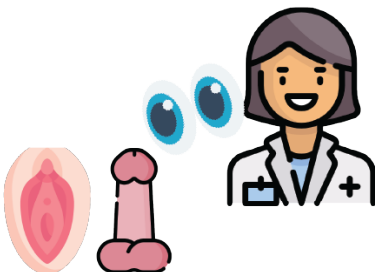
Some ways you can be tested for STIs are:



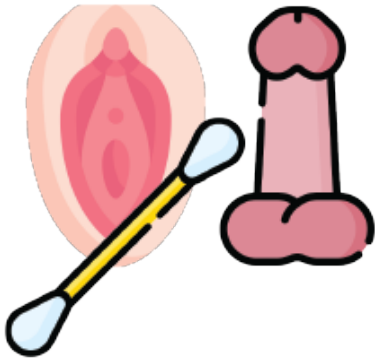
- Giving a blood or urine sample.
Then, your health care provider will check for STI germs in your blood or urine.



- If you have sores, bumps, or rashes, getting these things swabbed down with a special cotton swab.
Then, your health care provider will check for STI germs in the material from your sores, bumps, or rashes.

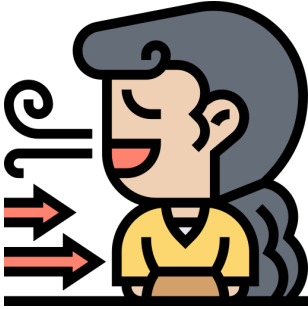


- Having a physical exam where your doctor looks at your genitals and checks for anything not normal



- Having your doctor use a special cotton swab to swab down your genitals.
Then, your health care provider will check for STI germs in the material from your genitals.

What if I find out I have an STI?



First, take a deep breath.



STIs are very common.



Many, many, many people who have sex get STIs.



You are not a bad person for having an STI.



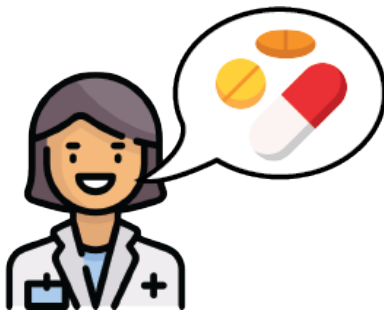
You are not “dirty” or “wrong” for having an STI.



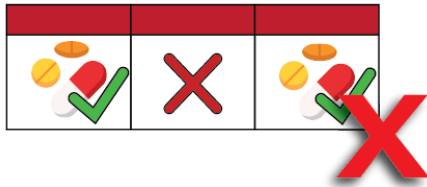
If you have an STI, you will probably need to take medication to cure or treat the STI.



(We talk more about what curing or treating STIs means in the next section, “Treatment of STIs.”)



Take the medication exactly as your doctor or health care provider tells you to.



Do not skip doses of the medication.



Do not stop taking the medication just because you feel better.



If you have an STI, you will also need to tell your sexual partner or partners about it.



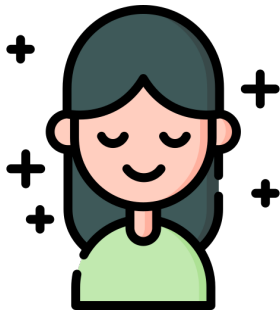
This can be a hard conversation to have.

Here are some [tips from Planned Parenthood](#) about how to tell your partner you have an STI:



Try to stay calm.

This is a hard conversation, but it's a conversation you need to have.



If you go into the conversation with a calm, positive attitude, your partner is more likely to react well.

Remember that STIs are a health problem, not a reflection of who you are as a person.



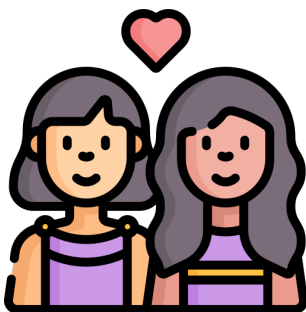
Having an STI does not make you “dirty.”



It does not make you a bad person.



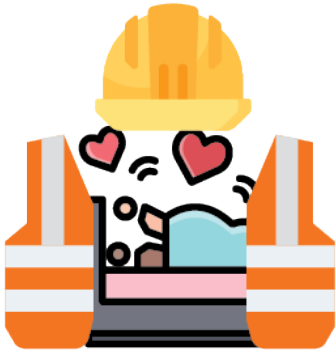
Millions of people around the world have STIs.



Many of them are in healthy, loving sexual relationships.



It is still possible to have a good sexual relationship if you have an STI.

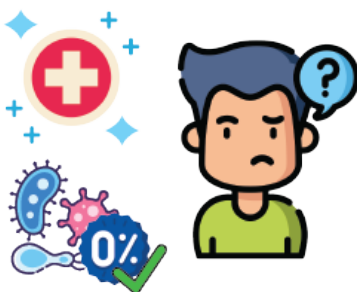


It is still possible to have safer sex if you have an STI.

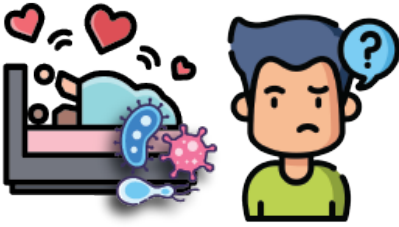
Talk about the facts.



A lot of people do not know the facts about STIs.



A lot of people do not know that STIs can be treated or cured.



Your partner or partners may not know much about STIs.



You can tell them the facts about STIs. If you need help learning the facts about the STI you have, talk to your doctor or health care provider.



Your doctor or health care provider can give you information on the STI you have.

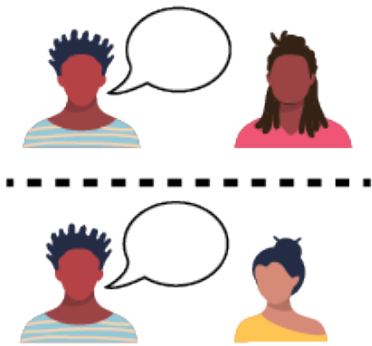


You can also check out [Planned Parenthood's information on STIs](#).



Have the conversation at the right time.

Pick a time to talk when both you and your partner or partners are free.



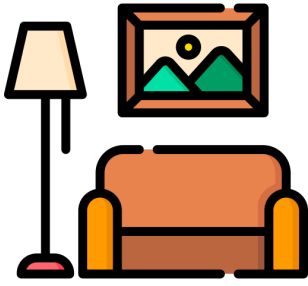
(If you have more than one partner, you might consider having separate conversations with each partner.)



Pick a time where you and your partner or partners can focus on the conversation.



Do not try to tell your partner or partners when they are really busy.



Tell your partner or partners in a place that is private and relaxed.



Do not tell your partner or partners in a place where lots of other people can overhear.



If you can, try to have the conversation in person.



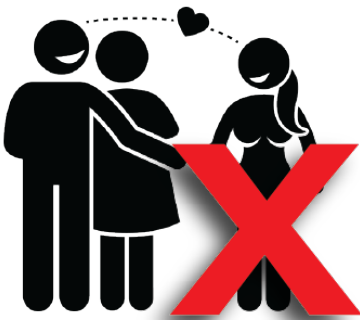
It can be hard for some people to hear this kind of news over phone calls, text messages, or video calls.



But there might also be reasons that you cannot tell your partner or partners in person.

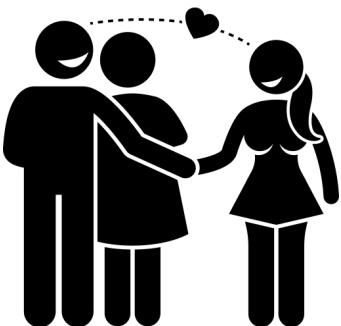


So you can also tell them over phone calls, text messages, or video calls.



Try not to play the blame game.

Having an STI does not automatically mean you cheated on your partner or partners.



(Cheating on a partner means having sex with someone else without your partner saying yes first.)



Lots of STIs can take a while to show symptoms.



Some STIs can take years to show symptoms!



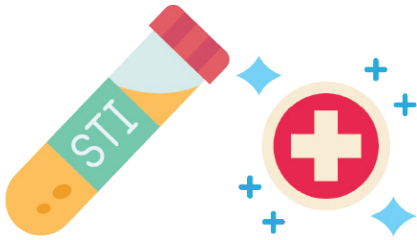
It is possible to have an STI during your entire relationship with your partner or partners and not know it.



Try not to let the conversation turn into you and your partner or partners blaming each other.



Blaming each other will not help the situation.



The best thing you all can do in this situation is get tested, and get treatment if you need to.



Think about your safety first.

Sometimes, our partners hurt us.



Sometimes, our partners make us scared of them.



This is not okay!



Our partners should never hurt us.



Our partners should never make us scared of them.



But this still sometimes happens.



You might be in a relationship where you are scared your partner will hurt you if you say you have an STI.



In this case, it is a good idea to **not** talk to your partner in person.



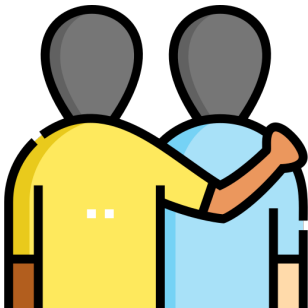
Tell your partner over a phone call, text message, or video call.



If you can, find somewhere else to stay, like with friends or family, when you tell your partner.



This makes it less of a risk that your partner will hurt you.



If you are worried about your partner hurting you, know that you are not alone.



There are resources that can help you.



You can read more about these resources in Part 9, "What is Sexual Assault?"

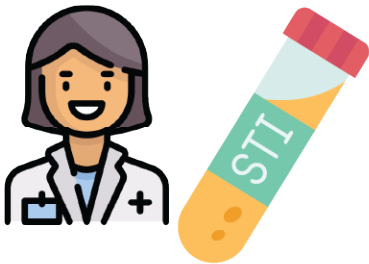
*Script for telling your partner or partners
you have an STI.*



Here is a script for telling your partner or partners that you have an STI.



"I need to talk to you about something important.



I went to the [doctor/health clinic] and had some testing done.

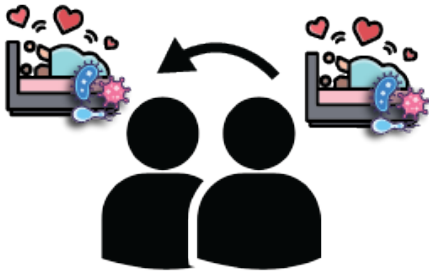


I found out I have a sexually transmitted infection, or STI.

HELLO

my name is

The STI I have is called [name of STI].



Because we have had sex, it's possible that you also have [name of STI].



You should also get tested for STIs.



Getting tested is the only way you will know if you have [name of STI].

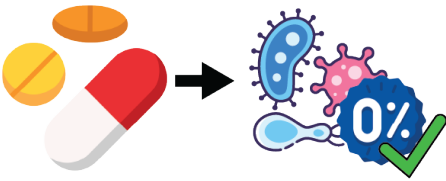


Do you have any questions for me?"

Treatment of STIs



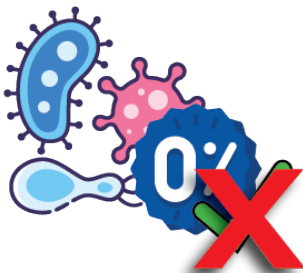
Some STIs are **curable**.



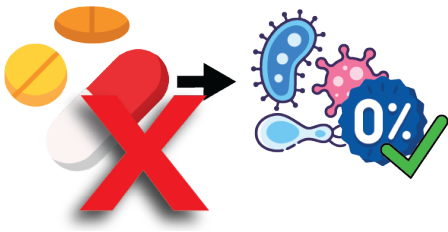
That means you can take medications to get completely rid of the germ that causes them.



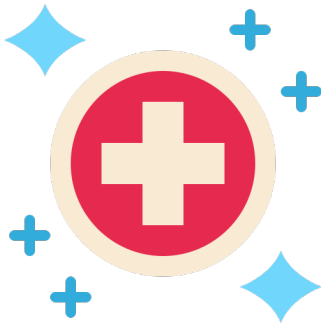
After you take the medication, there are none of the STI germs left inside your body.



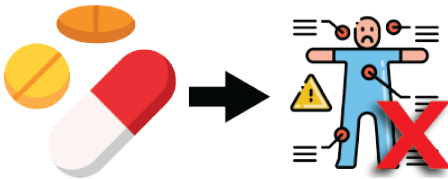
Other STIs are not curable.



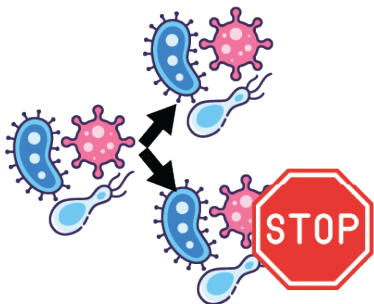
There are no medications to completely get rid of the germs that cause them.



But these STIs are still **treatable**.



That means you can take medications to help get rid of the symptoms of those STIs.



Treatment medications can also keep your body from making more copies of the germs that cause the STIs.