

INFORMATION FOR GAY MEN

What would an STI check-up involve?

Blood tests

To find out if you have HIV or syphilis, a blood sample will be taken and sent to a pathology lab. Results are usually available in 3-10 days.

Blood tests may also be taken to establish whether you are immune to Hepatitis A and B. If you aren't immune, vaccinations for both Hepatitis A and B will be recommended.

Swabs

If you have had receptive anal sex, a moistened swab will be taken from the first few centimetres of your anus to detect gonorrhoea or chlamydia. A swab is a thin plastic stick with a tip like a cotton bud.

Urine

A urine test will be taken for chlamydia in the dick. Please don't urinate for a few hours before seeing your doctor.

Your GP may spread these tests over a few visits.

These procedures – blood test, swabs, urine test – don't take long. Before testing however, your doctor will ask about your sexual history and discuss with you the possible implications of HIV test results.

Regular STI testing is an important part of looking after your health. The more gay men who are tested and treated for STIs, the sooner we can control the spread of STIs and HIV in our community.

For more information on STIs, pick up the new STI booklet from ACON. Available at your GP surgery, sexual health clinic, gay venue or sex venue. More information is also available on the STI testing website at www.whytest.org

Testing and treatment for most STIs is easy. To get tested, see a gay-friendly GP or local Sexual Health Clinic.

City – Sydney Sexual Health Centre – 9382 7440

Surry Hills – Albion Street Centre – 9332 9600

Marrickville – Livingstone Road Sexual Health Centre – 9560 3057

Newtown – The Sanctuary Men's Clinic – 9560 3057

Kings Cross – Kirketon Road Centre – 9360 2766

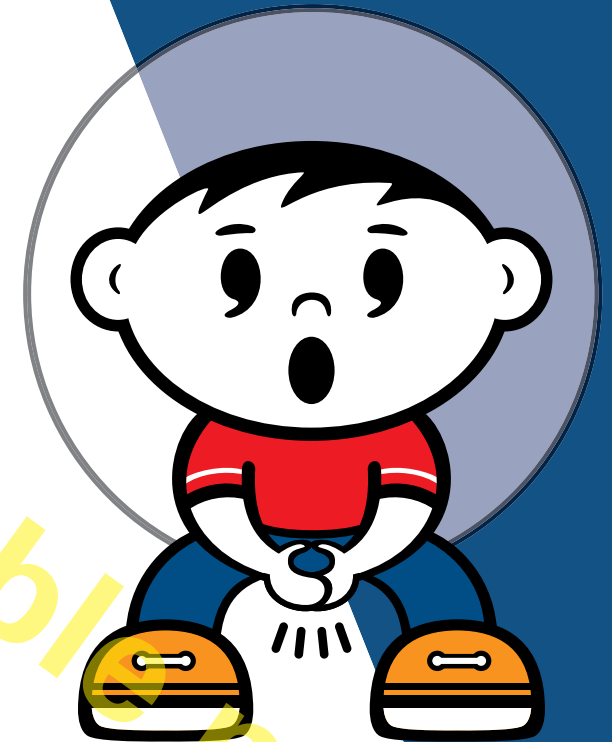
Canterbury – Canterbury Hospital – 9718 7655

Kogarah – Short Street Centre – 9350 2742

For other areas, look under 'sexual' in the white pages or call (02) 9382 7440.

Prepared by STIGMA – Sexually Transmitted Infections in Gay Men Action Group

South East Health, ACON, Central Sydney Area Health Service and GPs.



- look after your health by having regular STI tests
- Testing and treatment is easy

What's the concern with sexually transmitted infections?

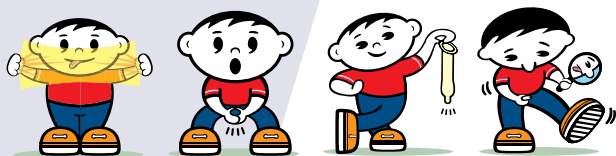
Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have increased in the gay community over the past 6 years. STIs such as gonorrhoea and chlamydia are continuing to increase. Syphilis, previously a relatively rare infection, has reappeared in gay men. There have been periodic outbreaks of hepatitis A, which can be spread by anal sex or arse play. New HIV infections have increased in gay men in Sydney over the last 18 months.

Concerns about STIs should not discourage you from having a fun and satisfying sex life, but there are ways to reduce the risks.

Why are there increases in STIs in gay men?

There are several reasons for the STI increase:

- STIs often show no symptoms. This means you can have an STI and pass it on to a sexual partner without knowing.
- Gay men generally have more sex partners, this means there is more chance of an STI being transmitted.
- Condom use has decreased in the gay community over the past few years.
- STI testing has not been a common practise for gay men recently.



Is there an association between STIs and HIV?

HIV is a sexually transmitted infection. If you already have another STI you are more vulnerable to becoming infected with HIV if you have unsafe sex. If you are HIV positive, having an STI can increase your viral load, which may have a damaging effect on the immune system. High viral load also increases the chances of HIV being transmitted if condoms are not being used during anal sex. For people living with HIV, some STIs may cause more severe symptoms and take longer to treat.

How can I protect myself against STIs?

Condoms offer excellent protection against HIV, and will usually protect against the transmission of other STIs. Condoms do not offer 100% protection against all STIs. This is because some STIs can be around the base of the dick or on the balls, areas not covered by a condom or can be transmitted by rubbing of the dick or arse during foreplay. For thorough protection condoms should be worn throughout anal sex. STIs can also be transmitted during oral sex when most men don't wear condoms. The risk can be minimised by checking for sores or blisters on or around the dick.

What should I do if I think I have an STI?

Signs that may indicate that you have an STI include:

- Cloudy, smelly discharge or pus coming from the dick or arse
- Blisters, sores, warts or lumps on your dick or arse or any of the surrounding skin

- Itchiness in the arse or genital area
- If it hurts when you piss
- If it hurts when you have sex
- Fever
- Swollen glands, especially in the groin
- Unexplained weight loss or tiredness

If you have any of these symptoms, or if you're worried about something, see a GP or attend a sexual health clinic as soon as possible.

Remember that STIs often show no symptoms.

For this reason, we now recommend that all men who have had sex with another man in the previous year have an STI check-up at least once a year.

More regular testing/check-ups are suggested for men who have sex with many partners.

Talk to your doctor about your recent sexual history and decide how frequently you might need the tests.

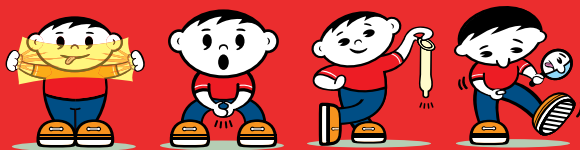
Testing and treatment is easy.

Gonorrhoea, chlamydia and syphilis are easily treated with antibiotics. If left untreated they can lead to more serious health problems.

Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B can be harmful to your liver, but usually clear themselves from the body after making you ill for some months. There is an effective and safe vaccine for both Hepatitis A and B

There is no cure for genital herpes, however treatments are available to help manage this viral infection.

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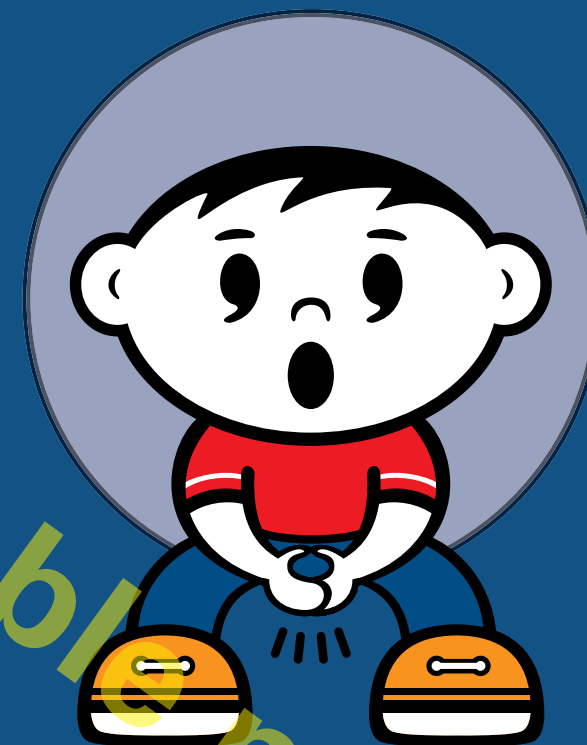
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