

# Sexually Transmitted Infections

**What are they?** Sexually transmitted diseases are infections that are passed between people by sexual contact. There are many different infections, either caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites. They can cause a wide range of symptoms, or none at all - so many people can have an STI without knowing it. Some common STI's include candida, gonorrhoea, pubic lice ("crabs"), as well as serious infections like Hepatitis B and HIV.

For **women**, generally speaking, the symptoms of an STI will include an increase or change in the normal discharge, itching or a change in smell, or a rash. Sometimes, there may be pain in the pelvis, or pain with intercourse or passing urine. For **men**, there may be itching, discharge from the penis, a rash or pain with passing urine.

STI's can sometimes be serious, as they can affect a woman's fertility, or cause pain in the pelvis. Thankfully, they can usually be treated very simply with antibiotics.

**Who gets them?** Absolutely anyone who is sexually active can get an STI. They can be caught from practically any sexual practice, although penetration is the most likely to pass on an infection. They are not caught just by "dirty" or "loose" people - you'd be surprised how many people have had an STI at some time in their life. People who use condoms get far fewer STI's, because the condom offers protection.

**How are they treated?** Most STI's can be treated simply with antibiotics. Often, tests must be taken, to ensure that the correct antibiotics are used.

As it is easy to spread STI's, you will often be asked, in confidence, about anyone you might have caught the infection from, or passed it to. Although this can be embarrassing, it is vital, to ensure that the "chain of infection" can be stopped. Health staff involved in treating STI's are trained in dealing with these sorts of issues, and fully appreciate what a sensitive subject it is.

**How can I avoid getting one?** The only way to absolutely guarantee avoiding catching an STI would be not to have sex. After that, condoms offer the best protection. Coupled with condoms, talking openly with your partner may help to avoid misunderstanding or problems.

**What should I do?** If you think you have an STI, you can speak either to the GP or nurse, or directly to one of the specialist clinics in Manchester. Often, the GP or practice nurse will actually refer you directly to the specialist clinic anyway, for more complete and rapid testing. The local clinics are as follows:

- Manchester Royal Infirmary
  - men 276 5212
  - women 276 5200
- Withington Hospital (often more choice of appointments)
  - men & women 447 4939

Both these clinics are highly professional, offering a completely confidential service. They can handle all necessary tests and treatment.

### **Further Links**

- [www.embarrassingproblems.co.uk](http://www.embarrassingproblems.co.uk)