



Sexual Health

Our mob cares



This booklet tells you about looking out for your sexual health, and what usually happens when you visit a sexual health clinic.

It provides information on:

- sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- how to prevent STIs
- having a sexual health check
- sexual health services in the ACT.

Your sexual health is important for:

- trusting and healthy relationships
- preventing infections that may affect your health and fertility
- planning pregnancy and contraception.

Many STIs have no symptoms so regular sexual health checks are important.

Sexual Health

A microscopic image of a cell, possibly a bacterium or a specific type of cell, showing a central nucleus and surrounding cytoplasm. The background is a dark field with numerous small, colorful polka dots in shades of blue, yellow, pink, and white. The cell itself is a large, irregular shape with a dark, circular nucleus in the center, surrounded by a lighter, textured cytoplasm.

Sexually Transmitted infections (STIs)

STIs are infections that can be passed from one person to another by oral, anal or vaginal sex.

STIs are passed on through:

- semen and vaginal fluids
- contact with blood
- skin to skin contact.

Some common STIs are:

- chlamydia, gonorrhoea, trichomoniasis – these may affect your reproductive organs and fertility
- genital herpes, genital warts, pubic lice (crabs) and scabies – these may affect your genital skin
- hepatitis B and C, syphilis and HIV (the virus that can cause AIDS) – these may affect your whole body.



Symptoms

STIs are common, especially in young people with statistics showing 1 in 14 have an STI.

STIs may cause symptoms such as:

- genital discharge
- genital sores, lumps and bumps
- pain when urinating
- lower abdominal pain
- bleeding between periods
- pain during sex.

But often with STIs there are no symptoms, especially early on.



**Can you tell if
someone has an STI?**

You can't tell if someone has an STI from how they look, dress, behave or who they have slept with!

You or your partner can have an STI and not know it, as there are often no symptoms.

You can have more than one STI at a time.

It doesn't matter if you are straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual – anyone that has unsafe sex can catch an STI.

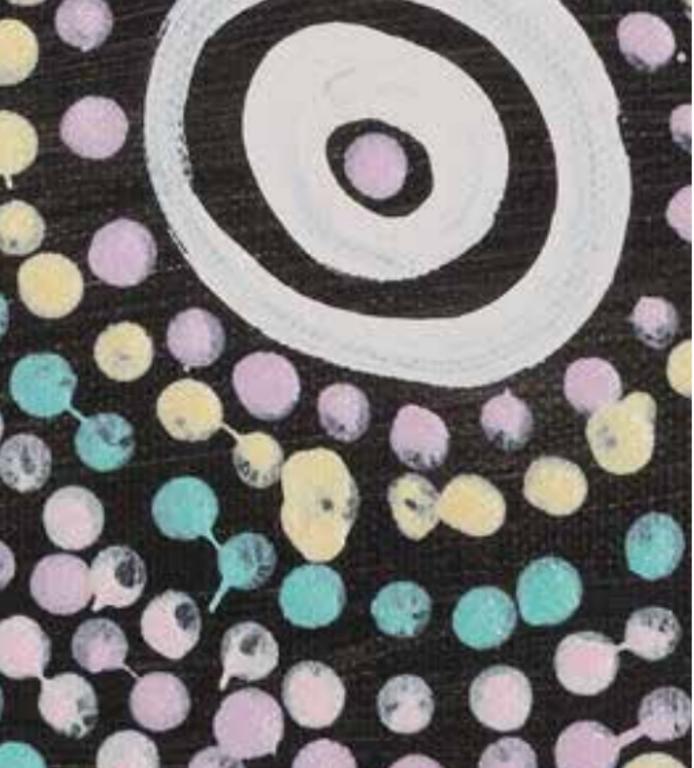


Protect yourself

Protect yourself from STIs by:

- using condoms
- reducing your number of sexual partners
- having regular sexual health checks
- getting vaccinated against hepatitis B, human papilloma virus (HPV – which causes genital warts) and possibly hepatitis A
- choosing not to have sex.

Stay safe – choose condoms!



Safer Sex

Things you can do to have safer sex and protect yourself from STIs:

- always use condoms to prevent pregnancy and STIs
- always carry condoms especially when you go out and when you travel
- tell your partners you want to use condoms
- don't be pressured to do things you don't want to do
- respect and care for your body.

Remember using alcohol or drugs can make it harder to stick with decisions about safe sex.



Sexual health check

When should you have a sexual health check?

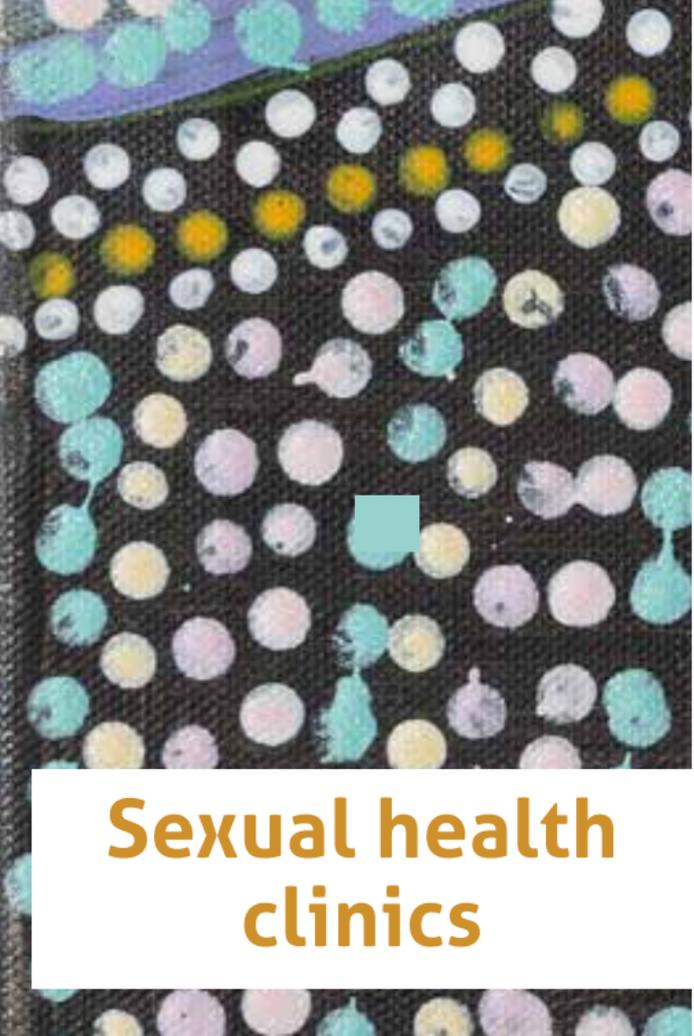
At least once a year and more often if you:

- are worried you may have an STI
- have had sex without a condom
- are starting a new sexual relationship
- want to stop using condoms with your regular partner
- have had sex with other people or worry that your partner might have
- share injecting drug equipment.

With a sexual health check you can also talk about:

- contraception
- sexuality and your relationships
- screening such as pap smear tests
- any other questions or worries about sexual health.

Testing for STIs is easy with a urine test, blood test or both.



Sexual health clinics

When you visit a sexual health clinic:

- you will need to complete a form with your personal details
- you will be asked for your phone number too, so the clinic can call you if necessary
- don't forget to tell them you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This is important so that we can collect good information about the health needs of our mob and you can be linked in with other supports if needed
- in most clinics, you can ask to see a female or male health professional
- you can go with a friend who can stay with you for support if you like.

Staff will treat you with respect and will assure you of your right to privacy and confidentiality



At the clinic

You may see a nurse, doctor or health worker and who will:

- take your medical history which will include some sexual history
- possibly ask you some personal questions about sexual partners and practices.

Sometimes these questions can be embarrassing or hard to talk about, however it is important to be honest, so you can be provided with the best care for you.

A sexual health check involves getting tested for STIs. Your health professional will explain any tests that you may need to have. Testing may include a urine and blood test. Sometimes you may need other tests like a vaginal or anal swab. Physical examinations are not always needed.

Don't be frightened to ask questions.



Results and Treatment

Getting your results:

The health professional who takes your tests will tell you when and how to get your results. This may mean making an appointment to come back or phoning in a few days.

If you go to the clinic for your results, these are given in a clinic room. This is for privacy and not necessarily because the news is bad!

Treatment

If you need treatment, your doctor, nurse or health worker will explain this. It's important to take all your medication even if you don't have symptoms.

If you do have an STI, it is important that all recent sexual partners also get tested and treated. Staff will talk to you about how this can be done.

You may need an appointment for a follow up test to make sure the infection has gone.

STIs are manageable, and most STIs are easy to treat and curable

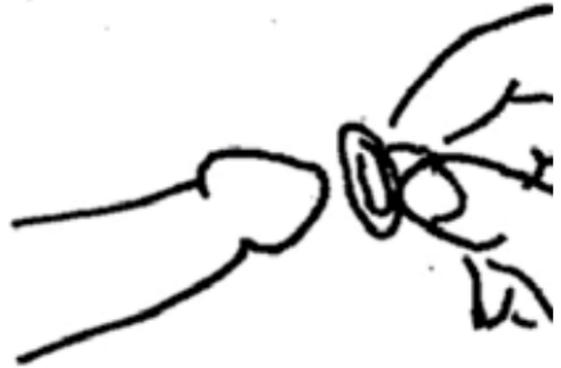


Using a condom

1



2



3



4



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Where to go

Canberra Sexual Health Centre (CSHC) at Canberra Hospital provides free and confidential information, STI testing and treatment. Services are provided by specialist doctors and nurses.

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service in Narrabundah provides sexual health checks and other medical services. Services are free and provided by doctors, nurses and Aboriginal Health Workers.

Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT (SHFPACT) in the city provides STI testing, contraception and sexual health care for which there may be a small fee. Concession rates are available and some services may be provided free.

The Junction Youth Health Service in the city provides primary health care and support services for young people. Clinical services are free and are provided by general practitioners and nurses.

All General Practitioners provide testing and treatment for STIs.

You don't need a referral to visit these services but you may need to make an appointment – all the phone numbers are at the back of this booklet.



“The Power of Two”

This painting depicts two people at the centre of the image who, if they protect their own health and the health of each other, will protect the health of the communities that are around them.

– Women’s group at Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal corporation

Useful Contacts

Your General Practitioner

Canberra Sexual Health Centre 02 6244 2184
www.health.act.gov.au/sexualhealth

Winnunga Nimmitjyah Aboriginal Health Service 02 6284 6222
www.winnunga.org.au

Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT 02 6247 3077
www.SHFPACT.org.au

The Junction Youth Health Service 02 6232 2423
www.thejunction.org.au

AIDS Action Council 02 6257 2855
www.aidsaction.org.au

Hepatitis Resource Centre 1300 301 383
www.hepatitisresourcecentre.com.au

Needle and Syringe Programs (Directions ACT) 02 6122 8000
www.directionsact.com

Free condoms are available at all these services.

Condoms (and fit packs) are also available through the Health Directorate at the Alcohol and Drug Service on Level 1, 1 Moore St, Civic and at reception at Tuggeranong, Phillip and Belconnen Health Centres.

There are free 'apps' for smart phones, eg: iCondom

Acknowledgements

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