everything you need to know about STIS
HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

What is it?
HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is a blood-borne virus that can damage the body's immune system, meaning it struggles to fight off certain infections. HIV can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

How is it spread?
There are 3 main routes of HIV transmission:
• From unprotected sexual intercourse (vaginal and anal) and oral sex with an HIV-positive partner.
• By sharing infected drug injecting equipment; and
• From an HIV-positive mother to her child during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.

What are the symptoms?
The only way you can tell if you are HIV positive is by having an HIV test - it can take up to 3 months after exposure to HIV for the virus to show up in your bloodstream. Some people may have the virus for years and look and feel healthy, but can still pass it on to others.

How is it treated?
There is still no cure for HIV and AIDS. Drugs can be given to help slow down the effects of the virus, but these will not get rid of the infection.

Chlamydia

What is it?
Chlamydia can affect both men and women. If left untreated Chlamydia can lead to infertility in women.

How is it spread?
Unprotected penetrative sex (anal and vaginal) or oral sex with someone who already has the infection, on fingers from one person’s penis or vagina to another; it can also be passed on from an infected mother to her baby during birth.

What are the symptoms?
Most people who have Chlamydia do not have any symptoms, however in some cases symptoms include:
In men: a discharge from the penis; pain when passing urine; painful swelling of the testicles if left untreated.
In women: a white liquid discharge from the vagina; pain when passing urine; pain during sex.

How is it treated?
A course of antibiotics usually gets rid of the infection.

Avoid contracting STIs by using a condom every time you have sex!
Genital warts and the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

What is it?
HPV is a virus that causes different types of warts. These are usually small fleshy lumps found anywhere on the genital or anal area. It is one of the most common STIs.

How is it spread?
Genital warts are spread by close skin-to-skin contact. This is predominantly through penetrative (anal and vaginal) sex, as well as touching infected genital areas. Women who are affected by the genital wart virus should speak to a sexual health specialist, as the virus may encourage precancerous cells in the cervix. Having regular smear tests will help detect this and may prevent cervical cancer developing.

What are the symptoms?
Small fleshy growths anywhere on the genital or anal area; sometimes an itching or a burning sensation in the genital area; occasionally slight bleeding from warts inside the vagina or anus. Generally they are painless.

How is it treated?
Although genital warts can be treated, they may take a long time to get rid of. A variety of treatments available - laser treatment, freezing, surgery, prescriptive drugs and chemical preparations.

Syphilis

What is it?
An infection caused by bacteria, which if not treated in the early stages can be very serious.

How is it spread?
Unprotected penetrative sex (vaginal and anal) or oral sex with a person who has the infection.

What are the symptoms?
There can be 3 stages of infection:

- First stage - a painless sore found near or on the vagina or penis or sometimes the mouth and anus.
- Second stage - a rash on the body may appear; flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache and sore throat may develop.
- Third stage - If left untreated, over time Syphilis can lead to permanent damage to the heart, brain and other organs - which could be fatal.

How is it treated?
Antibiotic tablets and capsules, or injections. It is important that both partners are treated to avoid re-infection.

If you think you have an STI go to your nearest GUM unit immediately. You may be nervous, but remember that the staff are professionals and they’ve seen it all before.
Hepatitis (also known as Hep)

What is it?
An inflammation of the liver. The type of hepatitis depends on the length of the illness and the strength of the virus.

How is it spread?
Unprotected sex with someone who has the infection, or exposure to infected blood, sexual fluids, saliva and urine.

What are the symptoms?
Some people have no symptoms but still carry the virus, so they can infect others. Hepatitis can take between six and 23 weeks to take effect once you have been infected.

The main symptoms connected with hepatitis are:
- Jaundice - where the skin looks yellow, vomiting, nausea and high fever;
- Flu-like symptoms, sore throat, or cough; or when you go to the toilet your urine becomes dark and the stools are pale.

How is it treated?
Treatments (vaccinations) are available for some forms of hepatitis and will vary depending on which type it is. A specialist will prescribe relevant medication. The treatment may be spread over several months, depending on how serious the infection is.

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Gonorrhoea

What is it?
Gonorrhoea is a common STI and is also known as ‘the clap’. It is caused by a type of bacteria, which thrives in warm, moist areas of the body such as the genitals, urethra, rectum and the throat.

How is it spread?
Through unprotected penetrative sex (anal and vaginal) or oral sex with someone already infected; or from one person’s penis or vagina to another. A woman who has Gonorrhoea can pass it on to her baby during birth.

What are the symptoms?
In women: a vaginal discharge which may be thin or watery, yellow or greenish (and could also develop a strong smell); pain when passing urine; itching or discharge from the anus.
In men: white or yellow discharge from the penis, pain when passing urine, itching or discharge from the anus.

How is it treated?
Early Gonorrhoea can easily be cured with a course of antibiotics. Your partner should also be treated to avoid re-infection.

Tell partners! They need to know.
Try to trace anyone that you might have passed the infection on to.
LGV (Lymphogranuloma Venereum)

What is it?
LGV is a relatively new STI caused by a rare type of Chlamydia bacteria. An outbreak amongst gay men in 2004 led to an increase in LGV in Europe and the US, and although only a few hundred cases have been diagnosed it is feared the number is substantially larger as it is difficult to diagnose and many physicians are not aware of its existence.

How is it spread?
Transmitted during unprotected sex.

What are the symptoms?
3 stages to LGV, with different symptoms depending on what part of the body is infected.
• First stage - 3 to 30 days after getting infected a small, painless sore or lump might appear in your mouth or anus, or on your penis. Many people don’t get a sore or notice one.
• Second stage - 10 to 30 days later your lymph nodes may become swollen in the area where you were infected - your groin, anal region or neck. If you were infected through anal sex, you may get painful inflammation or ulcers there, and possibly experience discharge of blood or pus from your anus. You might feel ill and flabby; constipation is also a symptom.
• Third stage - If left untreated for a long time, LGV will cause serious lasting damage to your anus or penis.

How is it treated?
A 3-week course of antibiotics will cure LGV provided it is treated before the third stage.

Pubic Lice

What is it?
Tiny insects, or parasites, that live on the skin and are often called ‘crabs’. They live in pubic hair, but are also sometimes found in other body hair such as on the legs or under arms.

How is it spread?
Usually sexually transmitted, although they can also be passed on by close physical contact, or by sharing sheets or towels with someone who has pubic lice.

What are the symptoms?
Itching where the pubic lice are present; possibly notice their droppings that look like black powder in your underwear; or little round spots, which are their eggs, fixed on your hairs. Sometimes the lice are noticeable on the skin, but usually they are too small to see.

How is it treated?
Your specialist will recommend special lotion or shampoo.

Find out more about these STIs and other infections at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk or call the free Sexual Health Information Line on 0800 567 123
Genital Herpes

What is it?
It is part of the herpes simplex virus of which there are 2 types. Type A causes cold sores around the mouth and nose, type B causes sores in the genital and anal area, which can also transfer to the mouth.

How is it spread?
It can pass between the genital area and mouth through: Unprotected penetrative sex (anal and vaginal) or oral sex with an infected partner when they are having an outbreak of herpes; touching a partner's infected mouth, genital, or anus then touching your mouth or genitals.

What are the symptoms?
Both men and women can be infected and may experience any of the following symptoms: Stinging, itching or tingling in the genital or anal area, pain down the thighs, legs or in the groin; small blisters which have a clear liquid inside them which if they burst leave painful red ulcers - these blisters may be hidden in the vagina, cervix or rectum.

How is it treated?
Once you have the virus there is no cure. However, a specialist can offer medication to control the outbreaks of blisters.

Non-Specific Urethritis (NSU)

What is it?
NSU is an inflammation of the urethra (the tube where urine comes out) that affects men only.

How is it spread?
Unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex with a partner who already has an STI. It's called 'non-specific' as a variety of infections can cause it. NSU can also be caused by damage to the delicate urethra through vigorous sex or masturbation, or a urine or bladder infection.

What are the symptoms?
White/cloudy discharge from the tip of the penis which is often more obvious first thing in the morning; pain, irritation or a burning sensation when passing urine; wanting to pass urine often.

How is it treated?
NSU is easily treated with antibiotics, although damage to the urethra can take time to heal.