how to stay safe from
sexually transmitted
infections
what's the big deal?

Let's be realistic – when it comes to sex nobody can tell you when the time feels right, or guarantee that it'll be an out-of-this-world experience.

Quite simply, that's your business. But if you want to be sure it's an option you won't regret, you owe it to yourself to make it safe.

Getting to grips with contraception is one thing. Knowing that you're not just protecting against pregnancy, but also against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) could just save your life. Even if you're not sexually active, you need to know the score.
We're talking about any kind of bacterial or viral infection that can be spread through sexual contact.

This doesn't just mean unprotected intercourse. Some infections can be passed on through oral sex (i.e., kissing, licking or sucking someone's genitals). You might also hear people talk about STIs or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), but it all amounts to the same thing.
what's a sexually transmitted infection?

There are lots of STIs out there, such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, genital warts, herpes simplex and HIV.

Many are increasingly common, and can affect anyone, gay or straight.

Symptoms don't necessarily show up immediately after infection. Some may show signs a few days after unprotected sex. Others can go unnoticed for a long period of time, or even show no symptoms at all.

Infections are often easy to sort out, but left untreated they can cause serious damage to your long-term health.

If you suspect you've come into contact with an STI or just want to be sure you're in the clear, get yourself tested at your nearest sexual health clinic. It's free. It's simple. It's the smart thing to do.
how to stay safe from STIs

The most common STIs are:

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhoea
- Herpes simplex
- Genital warts
- Non-specific genital infections (NSGIs):
  - HIV and AIDS
  - Hepatitis B
  - Trichomoniasis
  - Syphilis

These others are not necessarily transmitted through sexual contact:

- Candidiasis (thrush)
- Pubic lice
- Scabies
which STIs should I look out for?

Here are the most common STIs among young people:

**Chlamydia**

What it is: Chlamydia is the most common bacterial STI in the UK and is on the increase. Women aged 16-24 and men aged 20-34 are at the greatest risk.

Symptoms: Up to 70% of women and up to 50% of men infected with chlamydia have no symptoms. Because of this, a substantial number of infections remain undiagnosed. Where there are symptoms, women may have discharge, pain when passing urine, heavy periods or bleeding between periods, lower abdominal pain or abdominal pain during vaginal sex. Men may notice discharge from the penis and/or burning when passing urine.

How it is treated: Chlamydia is easily treated with antibiotics. However, if left untreated, it can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can lead to infertility. New methods of testing for chlamydia are now available which will allow easier and more widespread screening of the infection.