

# SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Knowledge is  
the first step  
to fight them

Sistema Socio Sanitario



Regione  
Lombardia

ATS Brescia

# Introduction

The expression Sexually-Transmitted Infections includes those infections transmitted through penetrative (vaginal, anal), oral-genital and oral-anal

intercourse. Some of these infections are transmitted by mere sexual contact. Sexually transmitted infections, spread around the world, are caused by mi-

crobial agents such as bacterium, virus, protozoa, mycete and skin parasites.

They present general or local (genital and perianal area) symptoms/ signs but they can be completely asymptomatic too.

An adequate treatment guarantees 100% healing of a great part of infections.



If not diagnosed and treated, some of these infections may cause infertility, ectopic pregnancies, cervical tumours, urethral stenosis or involve other

organs. Moreover, if contracted during pregnancy, they may be transmitted to the fetus, with consequences for the unborn child. Sexually Transmitted Infections can be prevented by using male or female condoms regularly in penetrative (vaginal, anal, oral) intercourse and a Dental Dam during cunnilungus/anilungus.



# ***HIV infection***

This is an infection spread in all the countries of the world and it is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus or its acronym HIV. The virus lives in the human body, in particular, it is found in the pre-ejaculatory fluid, sperm, vaginal secretions, blood and breast milk. The transmission routes of the infection are:

## ***sexual intercourse (the most frequent)***

Transmission occurs through homosexual and heterosexual intercourse or by direct contact between the genital secretions of an HIV-infected person and the genital or anal mucosa or the mouth of the partner. The presence of blood during intercourse increases the risk of transmission.

## ***contact with infected blood***

Transmission occurs by the contact of injured skin with infected blood. Infection can and does occur with just a small amount of blood. It can also occur by exchanging used syringes or any other elements used for preparing or taking drugs or by using not properly sterilised instruments (for instance, for tattoos or piercings).



For years, the disease may show few unusual symptoms or no symptoms at all, and then, when immune defences are down, appears AIDS defining conditions.

In order to know if you have contracted the disease, you must have a specific blood sample taken (HIV test). There's a maximum 3-month period called the "window period" in which the test may be negative even if the infection is present and transmissible. Sexual transmission of HIV is prevented by using a male or female condom regularly in all types of intercourse. Transmission by contact with infected blood is prevented by avoiding the exchange of syringes or any other material used for taking drugs and by making sure that the instruments used for tattooing/piercing are thoroughly sterilised. Furthermore, it is a good practice not to share objects such as razors, clippers, toothbrushes, and the like.

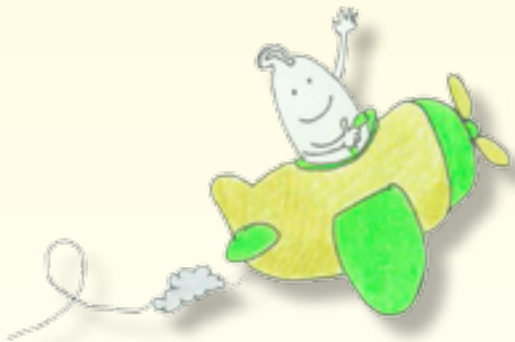


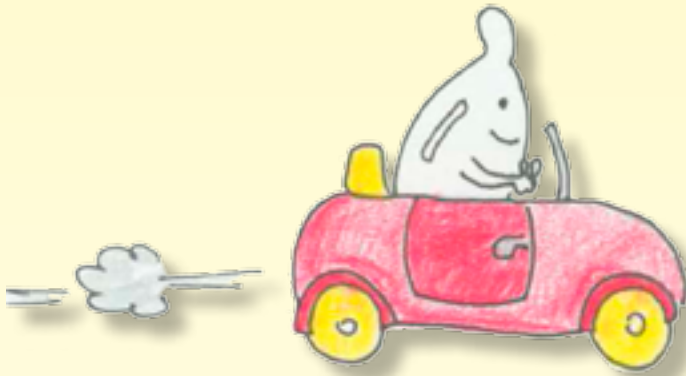
# *Syphilis*

It is a sexually-transmitted infectious disease caused by a bacterium called *Treponema pallidum*. It is first shown by one or more skin/mucosal ulceration at genitals, anal area or oral cavity (primary stage).

Skin lesions may appear later one, more frequently spread on the trunk, palm and sole (secondary stage). After years, if left untreated, syphilis may affect internal organs, as the central nervous system and heart (tertiary stage). Transmission occurs by direct contact between the skin/mucosal lesions of an ill person and the skin or mucosa of the genital area of the partner.

The use of condoms reduces the likelihood of transmission.





## ***Gonorrhoea***

It is an infectious disease caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* that can be found at the male urethra, at the uterine cervix, pharynx and anal canal of infected persons. In men, it is generally evident with a whitish urethral secretion or pus plus a burning sensation when urinating. In women, there are often no symptoms. If there are any, they are distinguished by vaginal secretion or pain during intercourse. Anal canal infection is evident by a mucopurulent secretion from the anal orifice, while if the infection is localised in the pharynx, it is nearly asymptomatic. Gonococcus infection may start as asymptomatic or just with slight discomfort. Transmission occurs through sexual (vaginal, anal, oral-genital) intercourse.

The use of (male or female) condoms prevents this infectious disease.



# *Chlamydia Trachomatis and Mycoplasma infection*

They are bacteria to be found in the male/ female urethra, the uterine cervix, pharynx and anal canal of infected persons. In men, it is manifested with urethral discharge and a burning sensation when urinating; sometimes, symptoms can be very slight or absent.

Women hardly ever suffer pain; sometimes, vaginal secretion may be present and the anal canal infection is manifested with secretion from the anal orifice. Localisation in the pharynx is nearly silent. Transmission occurs with sexual (vaginal, anal and oral-genital) intercourse.

The use of (male or female) condoms prevents transmission.

## *Hepatitis B*

It is an infection caused by a virus in blood and other organic fluids, particularly, in genital secretions. Transmission occurs through unprotected sexual (vaginal, anal, oral-genital) intercourse or by contact of injured skin with infected blood (even in small quantities). It can also occur by exchanging syringes or any other element used for preparing and taking drugs or by using not properly sterilised instruments (for instance, for tattooing or piercing). Acute infection may be asymptomatic or its symptoms may be tiredness and occasional jaundice (yellow colouring of skin and mucosa).

In about 5% of the cases, it may become chronic with the risk of developing cirrhosis and liver tumours.

The use of (male or female) condoms prevents the transmission via intercourse. Transmission by contact with infected blood is

prevented by avoiding the exchange of syringes or any other elements used for taking drugs and by making sure that the instruments used for tattooing/piercing are thoroughly sterilised. Furthermore, it is a good practice not to share objects such as razors, clippers, toothbrushes, and the like. Vaccination can protect you.

## *Hepatitis A*

It is a viral infection transmitted mainly by oral-faecal route (e.g. ingestion of contaminated food, such as raw seafood), but it can also be sexually transmitted (e.g. oral-anal contact). Acute infection symptoms are tiredness and occasional jaundice (yellow colouring of skin and mucosa), but it can also be asymptomatic. It never becomes chronic.

Sexual transmission can be prevented by avoiding contact of mouth and faecal residues.

Vaccination can protect you.





# *Papillomavirus infection (HPV)*

It is an infection caused by a virus called Papillomavirus.

It is highly spread in the population worldwide: It is estimated that 50-80% of sexually active persons are infected throughout their lives.

It seems that about 1% of those who have contracted the infection develop 'lumps' that may appear over the skin or mucosa of genitals, perianal /anal canal area or the oral cavity that are called condyloma or anal-genital warts.

In general, these lesions do not cause discomfort; sometimes, they may cause itching or bleeding if subject to traumatism.

Transmission occurs by contact with infected skin/mucosa.

Some types of papillomavirus, different from those causing the formation of condyloma, can transform infected cells into cancerous cells if chronically present.

Thus, it is important for all women to have a Papanicolaou test (PAP test) periodically, an examination that helps the early detection of cancerous lesions in the cervix. Women can get vaccinated, preferably, before starting their sexual life.

Condoms provide partial protection.

# *Genital Herpes infection*

It is a chronic infection caused by a virus called Herpes simplex. Transmission occurs by contact with infected skin/mucosa in the genital and anal-perianal area, even if there are no evident lesions. It is manifested with blisters in genitals or the perianal area, together with local pain and burning sensation, which successively turn into superficial erosions.

Once diminished, blisters can appear again several other times throughout life. Herpes-infected individuals must avoid sexual intercourse when the infection is evident as soon as the first symptoms appear (burning sensation and pain) as it is highly contagious.

Condoms provide partial protection.



# *Molluscum Contagiosum*

Viral disease manifested with small pinkish or yellowish grey papules with a dimpled centre; they may appear in mucosa, but mainly in different skin areas, in particular, at the lower abdomen, pubis, genitals and inner thighs. It is transmitted by direct contact with lesions; sexual intercourse also transmits the infection. Papules do not cause discomfort, but they should be removed so that they do not spread over other body areas and other people are not infected.

Condoms provide poor protection.



# *Pediculosis Pubis (Crab Louse)*

It is a skin infestation caused by an human parasite visible to the naked eye. It is transmitted by direct contact with an infected person or direct contact with contaminated linen. Parasites are mainly found in the genital area, but they can also be on legs, breast, armpit hair and on eyelashes. The only symptom is itching.

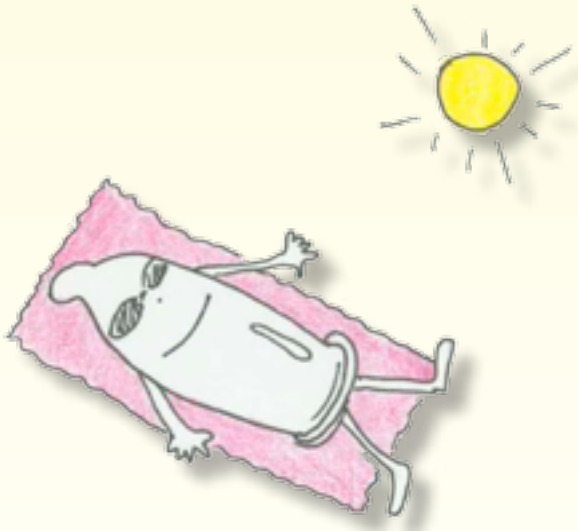
Condoms do not provide any protection.

# Tips

Use condoms regularly in penetrative sexual intercourse, vaginal, anal and oral, and use a Dental Dam for cunnilingus/ anilingus even with an acquainted partner.

If you have never undergone the HIV test, go to the Outpatient Service for Sexually Transmitted Diseases, where you will get all the information you need and you will have the chance of undergoing the test free of charge. It is important that you undergo this test periodically. If you have a partner, it would be good that your partner undergoes the test as well.

If you feel discomfort in your genital area, consult the Outpatient Service for Sexually Transmitted Diseases or your doctor of choice as soon as possible.



SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION	INCUBATION	SYMPTOMS		TRANSMISSION	CONDOM
		MEN	WOMEN		
Syphilis	From 15 days to 3 months	Primary stage: Skin/mucosa ulcer in genitals, perianal area/anal canal, oral cavity Secondary stage: Papules over the skin, often over the palms and soles as well		Contact of skin and mucosa of genital, anal-perianal and oral area.	Poor protection
Gonorrhoea	5-7 days	Urethral secretion and burning sensation when urinating	Often asymptomatic, vaginal secretions	Unprotected sexual (vaginal, anal, oral-genital) intercourse.	Sufficient protection
Herpes Simplex	2-14 days	Burning sensation/pain followed by blisters/ulcers		Contact with infected skin or mucosa	Poor protection
Chlamydia Trachomatis and Mycoplasma Infection	7-21 days	Urethral secretion and burning sensation with urination	Often asymptomatic, pain with urination, vaginal secretions, blood losses after intercourse.	Unprotected sexual (vaginal, anal, oral-genital) intercourse.	Sufficient protection
Condyloma or genital warts (HPV Infection)	From a few weeks to years	Growths similar to warts over the skin/ mucosa of the genital, perianal area and mouth.		Contact of skin and mucosa of the genital, anal-perianal and oral area.	Poor protection
HBV Hepatitis	45-180 days	Without symptoms or tiredness; some times jaundice		Unprotected sexual intercourse	Suitable protection
HAV Hepatitis	15-60 days	Without symptoms or tiredness; some times jaundice		Contact between mouth and faecal residues	-
Pediculosis pubis	7 days for egg maturation and hatching	Itching		Direct contact with the genital area or with infected linen	No protection provided

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