

STI Tests ~ What Do They Involve?

Many people are wary of having an STI (sexually transmissible infection) test as they are not sure what it involves.

Types of tests

STI tests are designed to detect if a person has an STI, regardless of whether or not they have symptoms. The type of test or tests you have will depend on if you have symptoms at the time and the type of sexual activity you have been involved in. Different tests are used for different types of infections.

Chlamydia is a very common STI, especially in young people. Symptoms of an STI can include an unusual discharge from the penis or vagina, itchiness around the genital area, a burning sensation when peeing, or a rash or small lumps on or around the penis, vagina or anus. If you notice any of these symptoms, or if you've had unprotected sex in the past, it's a good idea to get tested - remember lots of people have an STI and don't know it.

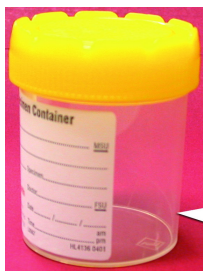
Where can I go to get one?

STI tests are available from GPs and sexual health clinics such as FPWA, as well as some other health services. Some people aren't sure how to ask for a test – if you can, be upfront and say 'I have noticed something unusual and want to get it checked out' or 'I didn't use a condom recently and think I may have been exposed to something.' You don't need to defend yourself or justify what happened, and remember doctors do these kind of tests everyday for all kinds of reasons.

What will happen when I get there?

For women, an STI test usually includes samples of vaginal secretions, taken with what looks like a long cotton bud. This is called a swab, and can be done at the same time as a Pap smear. In some situations a urine test may be needed for women, so don't go to the toilet for at least 2 hours before your appointment. This is because passing urine can wash away infected cells from the bladder opening, which can then take a couple of hours to build up again.

If it makes you more comfortable, you can take your own vaginal swab – this feels similar to putting in a tampon. If you are having a urine test, you can take your swab in the toilet at the same time.



Men who have no symptoms of an STI will have a urine test, however this is only suitable if you haven't urinated for at least 2 hours beforehand. Where a man has symptoms such as discharge from the penis, swabs are taken of the discharge and possibly from the opening at the end of the penis. This may also be done if you have urinated within the last 2 hours.

If you have had anal or oral sex, your doctor may also recommend testing these areas. If you have an ulcer in the mouth or genital area which could be caused by an STI, samples might be taken directly from the ulcer itself.

While some people find STI tests a bit awkward, you can't tell if you have an infection without getting tested. Many STIs are easily treated with antibiotics, but can have serious consequences if left untreated, such as infertility (when you can't have children). Try and choose a clinician you feel comfortable with.

Getting the results

Test results usually take about a week to come back, but someone with symptoms of an STI can be given treatment without waiting for results. If results show you have an infection, sexual partners also need to be tested and treated, otherwise re-infection can occur (as many STIs have no symptoms, partners may not even be aware that anything is wrong). Check with your doctor for more details.

Finding out you have an STI can feel isolating, but remember you're not the only one out there and it isn't the end of your sex life - you just need to take precautions. Talking to a friend or counsellor can often help.

Blood-borne virus tests

The type of tests described above only check for some STIs – if you want to be tested for blood-borne viruses (BBVs) such as HIV and hepatitis, a blood test is required. Depending on your risk, your doctor may offer you a blood test, or you can ask for one if you think you may have a BBV.

Having a HIV test can be quite daunting. You may find it useful to talk about it with someone first, such as a counsellor.

If you decide to get tested it's important to go to someone who has expertise in the area – you can see an FPWA clinician, or ask the WA AIDS Council (9482 0000) to provide you with information on practitioners in your area.

As the test can give a negative result for up to three months after the initial infection, if there is a chance you have been infected the test will need to be repeated three months later.

Test results usually take 7-10 days to come back, and post-test counselling is available. Phone FPWA or the WA AIDS Council for more information about counselling services.

Practising safe sex reduces the risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs).



70 Roe Street, PO Box 141, Northbridge, WA, 6865
ph: (08) 9227 6177 fax: (08) 9227 6871
www.fpwa.org.au
info@fpwa.org.au

Sexual Health Helpline (08) 92276178 or 1800 198 205 (Country Callers)
sexhelp@fpwa.org.au

Quarry Health Centre for under 25s
7 Quarry Street, PO Box 378, Fremantle, WA, 6959
ph: (08) 9430 4544 fax: (08) 9430 4544
quarry@fpwa.org.au

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