BETTER TO KNOW

www.bettertoknow.org.au

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Better to Know is a resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It provides information covering both men's and women's business and includes content relevant to sistergirls, brotherboys, and other gender-diverse and rainbow mob communities.

It was developed by Health Equity Matters in partnership with the Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA).

We acknowledge that this resource may not reflect the full diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures. The text can be adapted or modified to better meet the needs of individual Indigenous communities.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live and work.

Artwork
Front cover: Baylee O'Grady
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Cover art

Title: United Narratives
Artist: Baylee O'Grady

This work reflects the physical and cultural connections among communities, highlighting the shared learning experiences that arise from them. By sharing the narratives of our LGBTIQA+ communities, we enhance our mutual support and strengthen our ability to protect our identities as Black and Queer individuals while navigating the world.

Together, we create spaces where every story is valued, fostering resilience and understanding. These narratives serve not only as a testament to our diverse experiences but also as a beacon of hope and solidarity. They remind us of the beauty found in our differences and the power we hold when we stand united.

Better to know

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www.bettertoknow.org.au

About STIs

What are they?

Sexually transmissible infections (STIs) are infections that can be passed from person to person through sex.

Using condoms and lube is one of the best ways to prevent STIs and look after your health. PrEP and PEP are also effective options for protecting yourself against HIV, and can be used alongside condoms and lube.

STI stands for:

Sexually	It spreads through sexual contact.
Transmissible	Something being passed from one person to another.
Infection	Harmful germs (like bacteria or viruses) that enter the body and make you unwell.

How do you get STIs?

STIs can be passed on through close contact during sex, such as vaginal, anal (bum), or oral sex. You might not always see signs of an STI, but it can still be passed from one person to another.

The best way to protect yourself and your partner/s is by using condoms whenever you have sex. Getting tested regularly is also a great way to look after your body and your mob.

How do I know if I have an STI?

You might have an STI if you notice symptoms like itching, burning, or unusual discharge. However, STIs often don't show any signs at all—many are sneaky and can be present without symptoms. That's why it's important to get tested, even if you're not experiencing any issues.

Testing is a reliable way to detect STIs early and protect your health. The best way to know for sure is to get tested!

The only way to know if you have an STI is to get tested!

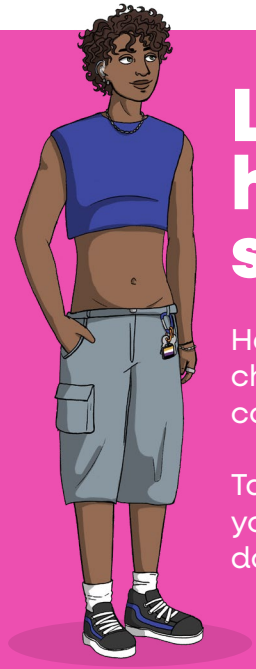
Test for STIs once a year, when you change partners, or if you have any symptoms.

What should I be looking out for with STIs?

STIs can affect different parts of your body, and most people won't feel sick, even if they have an STI.

- Discharge from the vagina, anus (bum), or penis
- Pain or discomfort during sex or when peeing
- Sores, bumps, or blisters in the genital area, mouth, or throat
- Itching, redness, or swelling around the genitals
- Fever or feeling unwell

Many STIs have no symptoms at all, which is why regular testing is important.



Lots of STIs have no symptoms.

Have regular sexual health checks, and make sure to use condoms and lube.

Talk to your doctor. Anything you say is confidential, and your doctor cannot tell anyone.

Getting an STI test

What should I expect?

Getting an STI test is quick and easy. You can visit your local Aboriginal Medical Service, GP (doctor), or sexual health clinic to get a test. When testing, you will be asked to provide a sample, which may include:

- Urine tests
- Blood tests
- Swabs (this could include anal (bum), genital or throat swabs)

You may be asked to take a different test based on your symptoms or the types of sex you are having.

The 715 Health Check is an annual health check for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is free at Aboriginal Medical Services and bulk-billing GP clinics. Yarn with your doctor about including an STI test in your 715 Health Check.

Who needs an STI test?

If you are having sex, getting tested regularly is important to keep yourself healthy!

Get an STI test once a year, when you change partners, or if you have any symptoms. Regular testing helps keep you and your partner/s healthy.

It is also a good idea to get an STI test if someone you have been with gets an STI.

How can I ask for a test?

When you're at your doctor's, let them know that you want a full sexual health check-up.

Your doctor may ask you some questions about the types of sex that you've been having. Don't be shame; these questions are confidential and help to make sure nothing is missed.

What happens if I get an STI?

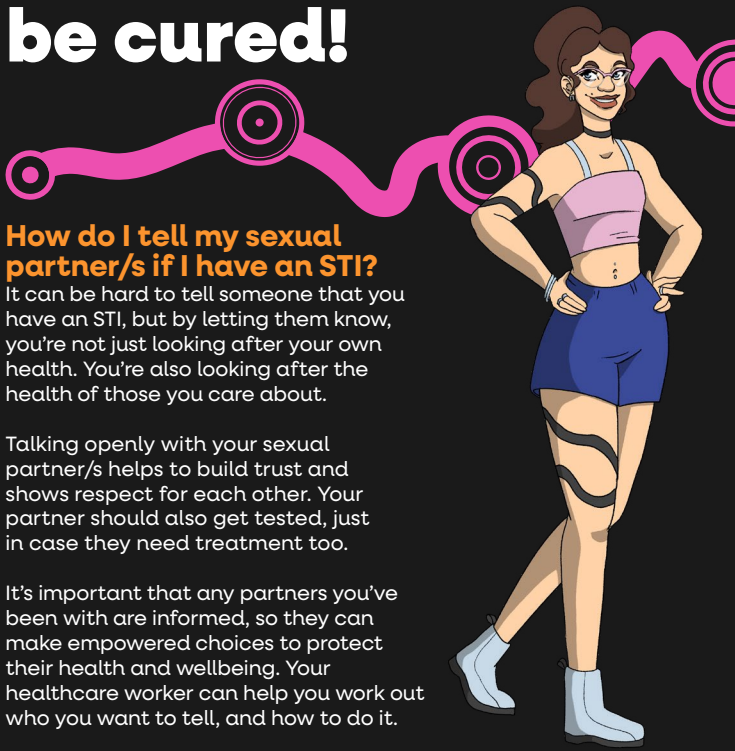
If you're having sex, it's important to know that STIs are common, and if you get one, it's okay.

Anyone can get an STI. The good news is that all STIs can be treated, and most can be cured with medication.

If you get an STI, your doctor will help you with the right treatment. It's important to follow their advice. This usually means taking a break from sex until you've finished your treatment and had a follow-up test to make sure it worked.

Make sure you take your medicine exactly as prescribed, keep your appointments, and stay on top of your health. Your wellbeing matters, and with the right care, you'll be feeling better and back to your usual self in no time.

And remember, all STIs can be treated, and most can also be cured!



How do I tell my sexual partner/s if I have an STI?

It can be hard to tell someone that you have an STI, but by letting them know, you're not just looking after your own health. You're also looking after the health of those you care about.

Talking openly with your sexual partner/s helps to build trust and shows respect for each other. Your partner should also get tested, just in case they need treatment too.

It's important that any partners you've been with are informed, so they can make empowered choices to protect their health and wellbeing. Your healthcare worker can help you work out who you want to tell, and how to do it.

Prevention:

How to protect yourself

The good news is that STIs can be prevented! Here are some tips to keep yourself and your partner/s safe:

- **Use condoms and lube:** They're one of the best ways to prevent the spread of STIs.
- **Get vaccinated:** Vaccines are available for certain STIs, like hepatitis A and hepatitis B. These vaccines are free!
- **Test regularly:** Even if you don't have symptoms, it helps to catch STIs early.
- **PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis):** It's a medication that significantly reduces the risk of HIV transmission. It's recommended for people at high risk of HIV exposure, but it doesn't prevent other STIs.
- **PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis):** It's an emergency treatment that can prevent HIV after a potential exposure. It must be started within 72 hours and requires a prescription. You can get PEP from the emergency department or your local sexual health clinic.

Where to get help

You can access free and confidential STI testing and treatment at many local clinics, including:

- Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS)
- Sexual health clinics
- Local doctors and health centres

It's okay to ask for support, and there is no shame in taking care of your health.

You can find your local sexual health clinic or Aboriginal Medical Service on the Better to Know website at:

www.bettertoknow.org.au

Remember: Your health, your choice

Taking care of your sexual health is an important part of overall wellbeing. You have the right to feel informed, supported, and respected in your healthcare journey.

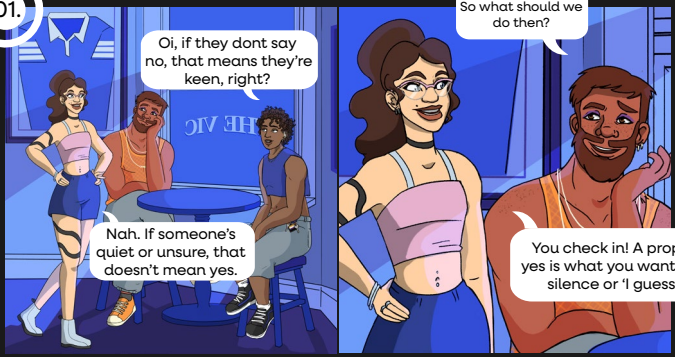
Remember, there is no shame in getting tested or seeking treatment for an STI.

Everyone's sexual health is important, and taking action to care for it shows strength and responsibility. It's not something to be ashamed of.

Consent: Let's yarn about it

There's a lot of mixed messages out there about consent, and that can make things confusing. So, let's clear up some common myths and get to the bottom of what consent really means.

01.



02.

03.
We're together, so we don't have to ask every time, right?
Actually, we do. Being in a relationship doesn't mean you always have a 'yes'.
Even if we've been together for ages?
Yep. Doesn't matter how long, always check in. It shows respect

04.
I saw you chatting up a few people at that party. I'm glad you called it a night, but you were pretty cooked.
Someone that drunk or off their head can't really give proper consent.
Even if they seem into it?
Better to wait 'til you're both sober and can think straight. No pressure, no regrets.

05.

I just figured it was okay since we've already done it.
I get that, but just because it happened before doesn't mean it's always a 'yes'.
Yeah, true. People can change their minds.
Exactly. Asking each time shows you care and keeps things respectful.

HIV: What you need to know

What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that affects the immune system, which helps protect you from illnesses. The good news is that treatment is excellent, and people with HIV can live long, healthy lives, just like anyone else. People with HIV who are on effective treatment cannot pass on HIV to their sexual partners. This is known as Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).

How do you get HIV?

HIV is spread when bodily fluids that contain the virus enter the body of another person. Blood, cum, pre-cum, vaginal fluids, anal (bum) fluids, and breast milk can all transmit the virus. HIV can be passed on through:

- Unprotected vaginal or anal (bum) sex
- Oral sex (very low risk for HIV transmission)
- Sharing needles or injecting equipment
- Parent to baby during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding

HIV is not spread by saliva, kissing, hugging, sharing cups, toilet seats, or sweat.

What are the signs?

Some people might feel like they have the flu when they first get HIV, but many people don't show symptoms at all. The only way to know for sure is by getting tested!

Why is getting tested for HIV important?

If you are sexually active or share needles, it's a good idea to get tested regularly. Testing is confidential and easy to do. The 715 Health Check can include free HIV testing at Aboriginal Medical Services and bulk-billing clinics. Ask for HIV testing to be included in your check-up.

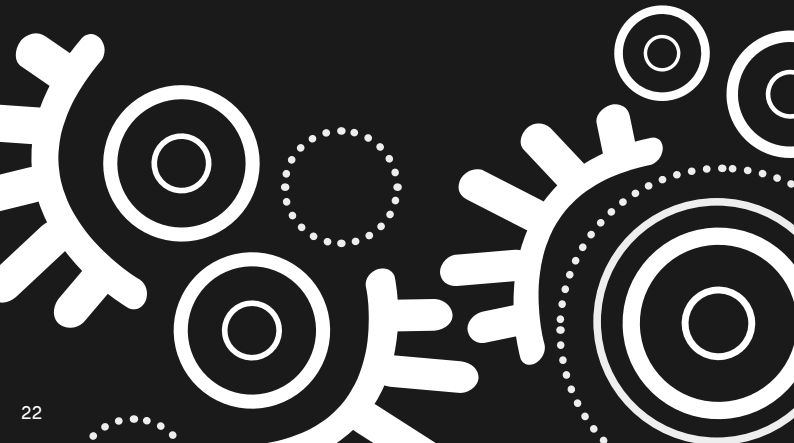
What is the treatment for HIV?

There is no cure for HIV yet, but the treatment is great! It reduces the amount of virus in the body to undetectable levels, which means you can live a healthy, full life. It also means HIV cannot be passed on to others through sex. (Undetectable = Untransmittable)

People with HIV on effective treatment **cannot** pass on HIV!

How can I prevent HIV?

- Use **condoms** and **lube** during sex.
- If there is a chance you have been exposed to HIV, **you can take PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis) within 72 hours** to lower your risk of getting HIV.
- If you are HIV-negative, **you can take PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) before having sex** to prevent HIV.



Always use new, clean needles and syringes if injecting drugs. Do not share items that may have blood on them

(e.g. razors, needles)

HIV and pregnancy

People with HIV can safely have children. Being on effective treatment can prevent the transmission of HIV from parent to child.

If you are living with HIV and are looking to have a baby, talk to your doctor so they can support you and your baby through your pregnancy.

Syphilis: What you need to know

What is syphilis?

Syphilis is a bacterial infection that can affect the penis, vagina, anus (bum), or throat and spread throughout the body. If untreated, it can cause serious illness, including harm to unborn babies.

How do you get syphilis?

You can catch syphilis through vaginal, anal (bum), or oral sex, or even through skin-to-skin contact like fingering, or sharing sex toys.

What are the signs?

Syphilis has 3 stages:

1. **Primary:** A painless or sometimes painful sore at the infection site (genitals, throat, or anus (bum)).

2. **Secondary**: A rash appears (often on the hands or feet) and you may experience flu-like symptoms.

3. **Tertiary:** This is rare, and happens if syphilis goes untreated. It can cause damage to your heart, brain, and other organs.

Why get tested for syphilis?
Syphilis is easy to test for with a blood test or swab from the infected area. The earlier it's caught, the easier it is to treat.

What's the treatment for syphilis?
Syphilis is treated with antibiotics. You'll need a follow-up test to make sure the treatment worked.

How to prevent syphilis
Use condoms and lube during sex. Regular testing helps stop the spread and catch it early.

Syphilis and HIV
Syphilis can progress faster in people with HIV and may increase the risk of HIV transmission if they are not on treatment.

Syphilis and pregnant people

If you are pregnant, it's important to get tested and treated for syphilis.

Without treatment syphilis can pass to your baby and cause serious problems.

Treatment will prevent this.

Common STIs and what to look out for

Chlamydia

What is it? A very common bacterial STI that can affect the penis, vagina, anus (bum), throat, and eyes.

How do you get it? Chlamydia can spread through vaginal, anal (bum), or oral sex.

Gonorrhoea

What is it? Another common bacterial STI that can affect the penis, vagina, anus (bum), throat, and eyes.

How do you get it? Spread through vaginal, anal (bum), or oral sex. It can also be passed from a pregnant person to their baby during birth.

Hepatitis A

What is it? A virus that affects your liver.

How do you get it? Spreads through sexual activity involving the anus (bum) or by sharing injecting equipment. It can also spread by sharing eating utensils, cigarettes, joints, or bongs used by someone with the virus.

Hepatitis B

What is it? A virus that affects your liver and can lead to long-term liver problems if not treated.

How do you get it? Spread through unprotected vaginal, anal (bum), or oral sex, sharing needles or razors, and through unsterile tattooing or body piercing equipment and from parent to baby during birth.

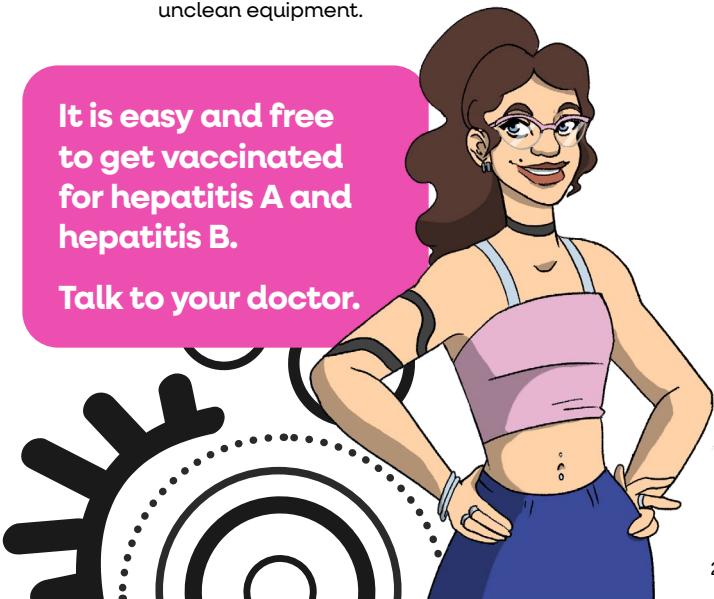
Hepatitis C

What is it? A virus that causes liver inflammation and can lead to serious liver disease.

How do you get it? You can get hepatitis C by sharing needles or razors, or from getting a tattoo or piercing with unclean equipment.

It is easy and free to get vaccinated for hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

Talk to your doctor.



Herpes

What is it? Herpes is a common STI caused by two viruses: HSV-1 and HSV-2. Symptoms for both can include:

- **HSV-1:** Causes sores, usually around the mouth (often called cold sores).
- **HSV-2:** Causes sores, usually around the penis, vagina, or anus (bum).

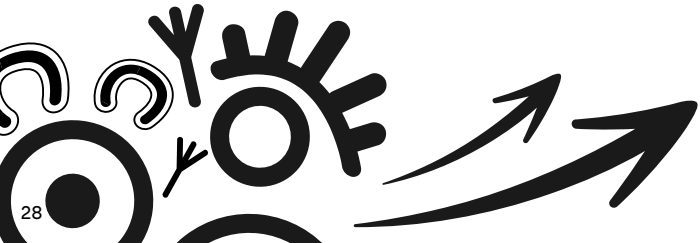
Herpes is a very common STI. Many people have the virus but never get symptoms. If you do have symptoms, there are effective treatments available from your local chemist.

How do you get it? Herpes spreads through skin-to-skin contact, including kissing and vaginal, anal (bum), or oral sex, so don't be shame.

Trichomoniasis

What is it? A parasitic infection. It is more common in women but can also affect men.

How do you get it? Spread through vaginal sex and can also pass through hands or sex toys that come into contact with the genitals.



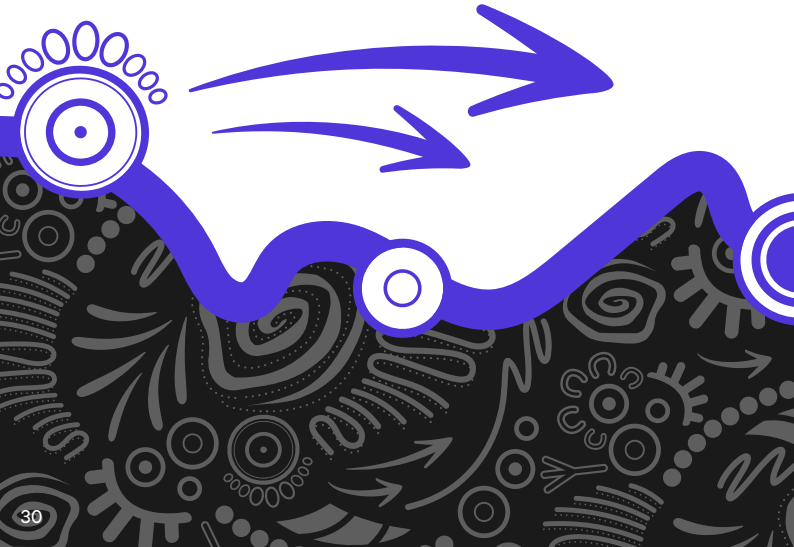
All STIs can be treated, and most can also be cured!

So have no shame around STIs.

It's easy to get tested. Testing is free under Medicare, and most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access free or reduced-cost treatment under the Closing the Gap scheme.

Talk with your doctor.

Services that can help



Aboriginal Community Services

Your local Aboriginal health service—such as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) or Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS)—can support you with confidential STI testing, general health care, counseling, and other support.

To find your local service, visit NACCHO's website below.

For more information about STIs, and to find your nearest clinic or Aboriginal Medical Service, visit Better to Know.

NACCHO

NACCHO
naccho.org.au

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bettertoknow.org.au

Community LGBTIQA+SB and sexual health services

Australian Capital Territory

Meridian
02 6257 2855
www.meridianact.org.au

New South Wales

ACON
Sydney: 02 9206 2000
Hunter: 02 4962 7700
Northern Rivers: 02 7238 7240
Toll free number: 1 800 063 060
www.acon.org.au

Northern Territory

NTAHC
Darwin: 08 8944 7777
Alice Springs: 08 8953 3172
Palmerston - NSP Outlet: 08 8931 3676
www.ntahc.org.au

Queensland

Queensland Council for LGBTI Health
Brisbane: 07 3017 1777
Cairns: 07 4041 5451
Toll free number: 1 800 884 401
www.quac.org.au

2Spirits
07 3017 1777
www.2spirits.org.au

Tasmania

Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis & Related Diseases (TasCAHRD)
03 6234 1242
HIV Infoline: 1 800 005 900
Hepatitis Infoline: 1 800 437 222
www.tascahrd.org.au

South Australia

Thorne Harbour Health
08 7078 4128
www.thorneharbour.org/south-australia

Victoria

Thorne Harbour Health
03 9865 6700
www.thorneharbour.org

Western Australia

WA AIDS Council (WAAC)
08 9482 0000
www.waac.com.au

National organisations

Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA)
02 9557 9399
ana@healthequitymatters.org.au

Health Equity Matters
02 9557 9399
www.healthequitymatters.org.au

National Association of People with HIV Australia
02 8568 0300
www.napwha.org.au

Positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Network (PATSIN)
1800 259 666
www.napwha.org.au/patsin/

Hepatitis Australia
02 6232 4257
www.hepatitisaustralia.com

What did you think?

Let us know!

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