Thinking about STBBIs can be uncomfortable and scary. However, if you are sexually active (or have been in the past) or you are thinking about becoming sexually active, it is essential to be aware of your risks and know how to keep you and your partner (s) safer. This pamphlet is intended to provide you with information regarding STBBIs, testing and safer sex practices.

**What is a Sexually Transmitted or Blood Borne Infection (STBBI)?**

STBBIs can be in the form of bacteria, viruses, or parasites. These infections are passed from one person to another during sexual contact. STBBIs can be transmitted during digital (with your hand) vaginal, oral, or anal sex as well as mutual masturbation or sharing sex toys and in some cases, such as Herpes, you can transmit it via skin-to-skin contact. **Vaginal sex** occurs when a penis or sex toy is placed in a vagina (or near a vaginal opening) or when vaginas are rubbed against one another. **Oral sex** occurs when a person places their mouth on another person’s genitals or anus. **Anal sex** occurs when a penis or sex toy is placed in one’s anus.

Some STBBIs are passed through fluids such as semen and vaginal secretions, while others are passed through direct skin-to-skin contact of the genital area (any area of the skin that a pair of boxer shorts would cover). *Keep in mind that sexual contact is not the only way to spread STBBIs. STBBIs can be passed through breastfeeding and vaginal deliveries and also through sharing needles, toothbrushes, razors, drug injection equipment, etc.*

Bacterial Infections are **curable** with antibiotics. They include:

* Chlamydia
* Gonorrhea
* Syphilis

Viral infections include:

* HIV/AIDs
* Hepatitis B
* Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV) 1 & 2
* Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

(*HPV is responsible for genital warts, abnormal cervical cells & cervical cancer*)

**Why Does a Person Need to be Tested for STBBIs?**

If you are sexually active or have been in the past, you are at risk of STBBIs. Even if you have always used protection (condoms), you still have a chance of contracting an STBBI. Condoms offer good protection against infections that are passed through fluids. However, condoms only protect up to 50% of infections that are passed through genital skin-to-skin contact (boxer short area). Please keep in mind that there is no such thing as 100% safe sex -- Condoms will NOT offer perfect protection.

Also, the majority of people who have an STBBI have no way of knowing they are infected because most infected people are asymptomatic (experience no symptoms). Therefore, a person cannot examine their genital area to see if they are infected. The ONLY way for a person to know if they are infected is to get tested by a doctor.

**To recap, if you are or have been sexually active, protected or not, you need to be tested for STBBIs regularly!**

**When Does a Person Need to be Tested for STBBIs?**

A person needs to have STBBI testing every year once they become sexually active. However, if you are changing sexual partners frequently, you should be getting testing more frequently. Also, if you are entering into a new relationship, it is beneficial for both you and your new partner to get tested together before becoming sexually active. After the initial STBBI testing in the new relationship, it is still a healthy practice to continue screening for STBBIs every year. Keep in mind that open communication is the key to a healthy relationship. You must be open with your partner when dealing with sex. You must be aware of the risks involved and take the appropriate steps to keep you and your partner (s) safe.

In between your regular screening, if you experience any unusual symptoms in the genital area (pain, discharge, itching, growths, sores, etc.), please see a doctor immediately before the symptoms disappear. **Remember that for certain infections (herpes & warts), you need to be experiencing an outbreak for a doctor to test and diagnose these STBBIs.**

**Who Needs to be Tested?**

At this point, it should be evident that ***anyone*** who is or has been sexually active is at risk for an STBBI and, therefore, needs to be tested. STBBI testing is simply a healthy practice!

**How Does a Person Get Tested?**

A person can get tested by setting up an appointment with a doctor. If a person does not have a family doctor or is not comfortable seeing their family doctor for this reason, please keep in mind that we offer STBBI testing and treatment at Planned Parenthood. We offer non-judgmental and confidential medical clinics throughout the week. You can call our Centre for an appointment, and if you are an NL resident, STBBI testing is covered under MCP.

Testing is most convenient for people with a cervix during a pap test. Usually, Pap testing should start at the age of 20 (if sexually active) and continue annually until you have three negative results in a row. If this occurs, your doctor may decide to spread it out to once every three years. A Pap test is responsible for detecting abnormal cells on the cervix. This test is a preventative measure against cervical cancer. **Keep in mind that a pap test does not test for other STBBIs!!**



Typical speculum used during STBBI and Pap testing.

During a pap test, the doctor will insert a speculum into the vagina to clearly see the cervix (opening to the uterus), and the doctor will swab the cervix. If you are visiting a doctor for a pap test and want additional STBBI testing at that time, please tell your doctor before they begin the test. To test for bacterial infections such as Chlamydia and Gonorrhea, the doctor will be required to take extra swabs from the cervix. A urine test for Chlamydia and Gonorrhea may be available in your area; however, swabs are more effective in detecting infections in individuals with a cervix.

Individuals with a penis are not required to visit a doctor as frequently. Therefore, they have to make a trip to see the doctor specifically for STBBI screening. To test for bacterial infections such as Chlamydia and Gonorrhea, with a swab, the doctor will be required to take swabs from the urethra (inside the tip of the penis). This may sound painful, but the penis is made from soft tissue that easily stretches. Most individuals are more uncomfortable with the thought of a doctor seeing their penis than the swab itself. A urine test for Chlamydia and Gonorrhea may be available in your area.

A doctor will provide patients with a slip to have blood drawn to test for the following infections: HIV, Hepatitis B&C and Syphilis. At some clinics, they draw the blood on-site, but the majority of times, a patient must go to a hospital to have blood drawn. This testing is confidential. Please contact your local Health and Community Services office if you are interested in anonymous testing (no identifying information).

As mentioned above, to get tested for skin-to-skin contact infections such as genital herpes and genital warts, a person needs to be experiencing an outbreak (sores or growths) in the boxer short area to be diagnosed. **Testing for these infections is NOT part of regular STBBI screening!!**

**How Does a Person Get Their Test Results?**

If you have swabs taken or provide a urine sample during your visit, the results will return to that clinic location within 2 to 4 weeks.

If you have blood drawn, the results will return to the clinic, where you will receive your slip within 2 to 4 weeks. If you are tested for HIV, your doctor may request for you to have a repeat test in 3 to 6 months to allow enough time for the antibodies to appear in your blood if you have been infected.

If you visit a doctor due to the presence of bumps or sores on your genitals, the doctor may be able to diagnose you at the time of your visit if it is indeed an STBBI such as genital herpes or genital warts.

Remember that a 2 to 4-week waiting time for test results is very average and sometimes takes longer. The labs that analyze these tests have many tests to process and can slow down when staff are on vacation.

**Safer Sex**

If you are going to engage in sexual activity (vaginal, oral or anal sex), you must know how to keep yourself safer from contracting an STBBI. If you do not use protection with ALL types of sex every single time you are active, you are at a VERY HIGH risk of contracting an STBBI. The following are some safer sex practices that need to be used correctly and consistently to help lower your risk of contracting an STBBI.

**Vaginal Sex (including sex toys):**

Latex external condom, non-latex external condom, **OR** internal condom.

**Oral Sex on a Penis:**

Non-lubricated external condom **OR** flavoured external condom.

**Oral Sex on a Vagina or Anus:**

Dental dam. **You can make your dental dam from an unrolled external condom (non-lubricated or flavoured). Snip off the tip of the condom and then snip up one side and unroll.**

**Anal Sex (including sex toys)**:

Latex external condom **OR** non-latex external condom.

***NEVER use two condoms of any kind at once!!***

**Planned Parenthood NL**

**Sexual Health Questions?
We Have Answers!**

**Location**:
47 St Clare Avenue, St. John’s, NL

**Hours of Operation:**

Monday: 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Tuesday: 12:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Wednesday: 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Thursday: 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Friday: 9 am - 4:00 pm

Saturday: 12:00 pm - 5:30 pm

**Contact Information:**
Phone: 579-1009
Toll-free: 1-877-NO MYTHS
(1-877-666-9847)

Email: csc@ppnlshc.com

**Website:**
www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com/

**Social Media:**

Facebook: Planned Parenthood – NLSHC

Instagram: @plannedparenthoodnlshc

TikTok: @plannedparenthoodnl

**Please check our Facebook page for additional information regarding resources, events, or clinic closures.**

**Revised October 2023**

The 5 W’s of

STI Testing

**Who, What, When, Where, Why,**

 **& How**

