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SOAIDS

> Sexuality is a very personal experience. For some people having sex is exciting, for others it's intimate and romantic. We should be able to relax and enjoy ourselves, knowing how far we want to go. And be able to talk about that to our partner.

It is important that you know how to protect yourself against STIs (sexually transmitted infections), and that you know what to do after unsafe sex. That's what this leaflet is about.

What are STIs? How can you prevent an STI? When and where can you have a test and what are the treatments for different STIs? We'll answer these questions here.

You can also find plenty of useful information about sexual health and sexually transmitted infections at soaaid.nl/en/STIs

What are STIs?

STIs are sexually transmitted infections caused by viruses and bacteria. They are passed from one partner to another during sex.

Some STIs can have complications if they're not discovered and treated in time. They could even lead to infertility. Fortunately, most STIs can be treated easily.

This goes for all STIs:
the sooner you get treatment, the better. Get yourself tested quickly if you've taken any risks.

> You won't always notice that you have an STI. People are often unaware that they have chlamydia, for instance, while it could have serious consequences. And if you have an STI without being aware of it, you can pass it on to your sexual partners.

At the back of this leaflet there is a chart describing the most common risks you're taking with different kinds of sex.

What is safe?

Prevention is better than cure! You can easily prevent STIs – as long as you know how to have safe sex. But what exactly is safe?

Safe is sex with no risk of getting an STI

Safe without a condom

- You and your long-term partner have had an STI test and neither of you have an STI. You never have sex with anyone else and you trust each other. Then you can have safe sex without using condoms.
- Caressing, kissing, hugging, massaging, masturbating, or satisfying each other with your hands - these are all safe things to do with your partner.

Safe with a condom

- When you use a **condom** for vaginal sex (penis in the vagina), we call this safe.
- When you use a **condom** and enough lubricant for anal sex (penis in the anus), we call this safe sex too.
- To prevent getting an STI when you have oral sex (licking or sucking the penis, vagina or anus), you can use a condom or dental dam. You don't like the taste of rubber? Flavoured condoms and dams are also available.

What is unsafe sex?

If you don't know whether your sexual partner has an STI, then **sex without a condom** means running a risk of catching an STI. That is unsafe sex. Always make sure you have condoms with you!

Sex with the risk of an STI is unsafe

Unsafe without a condom

- Vaginal sex without a condom (penis in the vagina).
 - Anal sex without a condom (penis in the anus).
 - Oral sex (licking or sucking the penis or vagina) without a condom or dental dam.
 - Using a sex toy such as a dildo on multiple partners without cleaning it or covering it with a new condom.
- > Condoms sometimes tear. If this happens, don't panic - but do think about getting an STI test. Go to soaaid.nl/en/STIs/sti-test

You can find information about condoms and proper condom use on soaaid.nl/en/condoms

How do you catch an STI?

- **By having sex.** Bacteria and viruses can be transmitted from one person to another during sex, via preseminal fluid, semen, vaginal fluid or blood. Also by contact between the mucous membranes of the penis, vagina, mouth or anus. So if, for example, you rub your penis against a vagina or anus without penetrating, you still run the risk of catching an STI.

Other ways of catching or passing on an STI

- **Blood.** A number of STIs can be transmitted through blood. You can become infected with HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis, for example, by getting a tattoo or piercing done unhygienically (although the risk is very small). **Taking drugs** might also be risky if you share syringes or straws. In the Netherlands, you can't become infected with HIV or another STI through a blood transfusion.
- **Pregnancy.** **During pregnancy**, a mother can pass on HIV, hepatitis B or syphilis to her unborn child. HIV, hepatitis B, syphilis, chlamydia, herpes and gonorrhoea can also be transmitted from mother to baby **during the birth**.

> How do you know you have an STI? Get tested!

There is only one way to be certain you haven't caught an STI: go to your doctor or GGD health centre to be checked and tested. **If you do have an STI, you need to know as soon as possible.** The sooner you get treatment, the better. And you can also warn your partner(s) quickly.

The STI test

You can go to your doctor to have an STI test done. The results will be confidential as your doctor must observe the rule of professional secrecy. Your health insurance will cover the STI test, but the costs do come under the excess costs you pay yourself.

You will be tested for different STIs, depending on the risks you have taken. **Are you heterosexual and younger than 25? Then usually a chlamydia test will do.** Read about chlamydia at soaids.nl/en/chlamydia. If you have any symptoms, you may be tested for other STIs too.

Some people belong to so-called **at-risk groups**. These are people who run a higher risk of getting STIs and can have an STI test at the GGD. This includes **men who have sex with men**, people from countries where STIs and HIV are more common, and **sex workers** (prostitutes).

A standard STI test at a GGD will find out whether you have chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis or HIV. The health workers will take some blood and urine, as well as swabs of fluid from the vagina, throat or anus.

If you are a man who has sex with men or you are a sex worker, you can also have a vaccination against hepatitis B at the GGD.

- > You'll find more information on the STI test at soaids.nl/en/sti-test.

*At the Soa Aids Nederland website, you can use the 'GGD-locator' to find your nearest GGD STI clinic:
soaids.nl/en/test-locator*

Why take an STI test?

There are different reasons for taking an STI test. If you have any symptoms, then go to your doctor immediately or make an appointment at the GGD. You should also make an immediate appointment if someone **warns** you that you might have caught an STI. Are you worried after unsafe sex or a torn condom, but you don't have any symptoms? Then still make an appointment for an STI test.

Reasons to have an STI test

- You have symptoms. These could be warts, blisters, unusual discharge or pain when you pass urine.
- A partner or former partner has warned you that he or she has an STI.
- You have a new relationship. You and your partner want to have safe sex without a condom.
- You had unsafe sex and you don't know whether that person has an STI.
- A condom tore.
- You're a man who has sex with men. Get tested regularly (every 3-6 months).
- You're pregnant. You don't want to pass on any STIs to your child.
- Just to be sure, because you've had unsafe sex in the past.

The HIV test

Do you want to know for certain that you don't have HIV? Then take an additional test three months after you had unsafe sex. It can take up to three months before antibodies against HIV can be detected in your blood. Occasionally, it can take this long for an HIV test to determine whether you have HIV.

If you have any symptoms which might be an indication of an **acute HIV infection** and you know that you've run a risk of becoming infected with HIV, take a test as soon as possible.

- > **The sooner you know you have HIV, the better. Early treatment of HIV works best.**

Read more about the HIV test and the symptoms of acute HIV at soaids.nl/en/hiv

HIV risks

If you've been **raped** or something went wrong with a condom during anal sex, contact a doctor immediately. You may be at risk of becoming infected with HIV.

If there is a risk of HIV, you can get so-called **PEP treatment** from the GGD or a hospital emergency department. The treatment consists of anti-HIV drugs that you take for a month. This will prevent an HIV infection.

Other treatment might also be necessary, such as a **hepatitis B vaccination** or **morning-after pill**.

Read more about Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) at soaids.nl/en/pep or call the AIDS STI helpline - 0900 204 204 0

Read more about hepatitis B vaccination at soaids.nl/en/hep-b. In the Netherlands hepatitis B vaccination is available from your **doctor** or the **GGD**.

Warn your partner

When you have an STI, you are infectious - even if you don't have any symptoms. So warn all your sexual partners. **This is important!**

The person you had sex with might also have the STI and could pass it on to other people without knowing it. The consequences are often serious. Discuss with your doctor who you need to warn. Usually this will be your **sexual partners in the past six months**, sometimes your partners of the previous year or more.

- > If you don't want to tell your partners yourself that you have an STI, you can ask the GGD to warn your sexual partners on your behalf. If someone warns you that you might have caught an STI, take it seriously. Have an STI test immediately, even if you don't have any symptoms.

STI treatment

If they find out that you have an STI, the doctor or nurse will tell you about the available treatment.

If the STI is a bacterial infection, you will be given an antibiotic. This will cure the STI completely. That is the case with chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis.

STIs that are caused by viruses are more difficult to cure. Some, like HIV and herpes, can never be cured.

The five most common STIs in the Netherlands are listed below.

Top Five STIs in the Netherlands:

1. Chlamydia

Chlamydia is by far the most common STI in the Netherlands. Every year, tens of thousands of people catch it and pass it on. Chlamydia is most common among heterosexual men and women under 25. To find out more about the symptoms, prevention and treatment of chlamydia, go to soaids.nl/en/chlamydia.

2. Genital warts

Genital warts are caused by the benign HPV virus. After chlamydia, genital warts are the most common STI in the Netherlands. They particularly occur among sexually active people in their twenties. HPV viruses stay in your body forever. For more information about the HPV virus, prevention and treatment of genital warts, go to soaids.nl/en/genital-warts.

3. Genital herpes

Genital herpes is caused by the herpes virus. After you are infected with this virus, it stays in your body forever. For more information on genital herpes go to soaids.nl/en/herpes.

4. Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is caused by bacteria called gonococci. This STI can be effectively cured with antibiotics. Gonorrhoea is most common in the Netherlands among men and boys who have sex with other men. You'll find more information on gonorrhoea at soaids.nl/en/gonorrhoea.

5. HIV infection

An HIV infection is caused by the HIV virus. Effective drugs against HIV are available. **It is important to know that you have HIV**, because if you are treated in time, HIV will do less harm to your body. And it is unlikely that **a person taking anti-HIV drugs properly will transmit the virus to other people**.

- > Every year, HIV is detected in approximately 1,200 people in the Netherlands, mostly among men who have sex with men and members of certain ethnic minorities. If you belong to an at-risk group, get tested regularly. For information about prevention, testing and treatment of HIV, go to soaids.nl/en/hiv.

Helpful websites:

Soa Aids Nederland - soaaims.nl/en/STIs

Sense - sense.info*

Man tot Man - mantotman.nl*

Aids Fonds - aidsfonds.nl

Hiv Vereniging Nederland - hivnet.org

GGD - ggd.nl

Partnerwaarschuwing - partnerwaarschuwing.nl*

Other English information:

For information on HIV tht.org.uk

For information on sexual health nhs.uk

*Dutch only

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Questions?

Any questions about HIV or other STIs?

- > Call the 'Aids Soa Infolijn' (AIDS STI helpline)
0900 204 204 0 (10 cents per minute)
Monday and Tuesday: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Wednesday, Thursday and Friday: 2 - 6 p.m.
- > **Or send an email to the Aids Soa Infolijn:**
Sense@soaaims.nl. You will receive an answer within two working days.
- > **Or visit the chat office hour on soatest.nl**
Monday - Thursday: 1.30 – 3.30 p.m.

Sex – Activities and Risks

type of sex	sexual activity	risk of HIV, STIs or pregnancy	advice for behaviour
anal sex, anal penetration, anal fucking	the man inserts his penis into the partner's anus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unsafe for HIV - unsafe for STIs - for MSM also risk of acquiring LGV and hepatitis C - safe for pregnancy 	use a condom and lots of water-based or silicone-based lubricant
coitus interruptus, withdrawal, pull-out method (after vaginal or anal penetration)	withdrawing penis from vagina and/or anus prior to ejaculation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unsafe for HIV - unsafe for STIs - unsafe for pregnancy 	use a condom or female condom
contact between penis and anus (without penetration)	a person rubs the penis against another person's anus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV, unless preseminal fluid/semen enters the anus - unsafe for STIs - safe for pregnancy 	use a condom
contact between penis and vagina (without penetration)	partners rub their genitals against each other, or genitals are very close	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV, unless preseminal fluid/semen enters the vagina - unsafe for STIs - safe for pregnancy, unless preseminal fluid/semen enters the vagina 	use a condom or female condom
fist fucking, fisting	penetrating the anus or vagina with the whole hand and possibly a part of the arm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV - unsafe for STIs - MSM run the risk of acquiring Hepatitis C and LGV - safe for pregnancy 	use unused latex gloves with each partner
kissing, French kissing	using mouth and tongue to touch each other's mouth and tongue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV - safe for STIs - very small risk if one of the partners has an STI or wound inside or around the mouth - safe for pregnancy 	
licking or sucking the penis, blow job, featillo	stimulating the penis with mouth and tongue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV, without ejaculating in the mouth - unsafe for STIs - small risk, even without blood, of e.g. herpes and gonorrhoea - safe for pregnancy 	use a condom to reduce risk
licking the anus, rimming, ass eating	stimulating the anus with the mouth and tongue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV, unless there is blood resulting from anal sex or haemorrhoids (piles) - unsafe for STIs - risk of getting hepatitis A, stomach and bowel diseases - safe for pregnancy 	reduce risk by using a dental dam or a cut- open condom
licking the vagina, cunnilingus, cunt eating	the mouth and tongue stimulate the vagina and clitoris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV, unless the person who is being licked is having her period - unsafe for STIs - slight risk, even without menstruation, of catching herpes - safe for pregnancy 	reduce risk by using a dental dam or a cut- open condom
massaging, caressing	Caressing and kneading each other's bodies all over, possibly using massage oils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV - safe for STIs - safe for pregnancy 	
masturbation, petting, jerking off, wanking, fingering, mutual masturbation, satisfying yourself or your partner with your hand	stimulating yourself or your partner or giving an orgasm by massaging the penis, clitoris or anus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV - safe for STIs - safe for pregnancy 	remember that when the fingers transfer vaginal or rectal mucus, semen, or menstrual blood from one person's mucous membrane to the other's, there is a slight risk of an STI or pregnancy
rubbing	partners rub their bodies against each other for sexual pleasure; with or without clothes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV - safe for STIs - safe for pregnancy 	
sexual intercourse, fucking, copulation	the man's penis penetrates the woman's vagina and he ejaculates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - unsafe for HIV - unsafe for STIs - unsafe for pregnancy 	use a condom or female condom
using sex toys	using sex toys, such as dildos and vibrators, to stimulate or satisfy yourself and/or your partner sexually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safe for HIV - unsafe when shared - safe for STIs - unsafe when shared - safe for pregnancy 	use your own sex toys without sharing them, cover the toy with a condom, use a new condom for each new partner or clean the toys thoroughly for each new partner