



Health checks

Acknowledgements

Jean Hailes for Women's Health acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continued connection to land, waters and culture. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource has been developed in consultation with Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation (NT), Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff from Women's Health and Family Services (WA), and Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia.

We would like to acknowledge the women of Ramingining, Galiwin'ku and Yirrkala communities (NT), and women from the Yorgas Own Time group in Belmont (WA) who participated in consultations to help shape this resource.

Jean Hailes for Women's Health gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government.

 **Jean Hailes**
for Women's Health

About the artwork

The artwork and illustrations are by Coolamon Creative – a 100% Aboriginal owned and operated creative services agency based in Alice Springs.



“This contemporary design shows the families, healthy people, and healthy women. The varied land elements (waterholes, stars and hills) represent the many different regions across Australia that everyone is from, each with different backgrounds and journeys. Our health is vital and should remain at the centre in everything we do as individuals and as a community.” – Samantha Campbell, Graphic Designer & Illustrator, Coolamon Creative.

About us

Jean Hailes for Women's Health (Jean Hailes) is a national not-for-profit organisation committed to improving women's health across Australia. We use the latest research to develop our website and resources on a range of topics, such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), periods, sex and sexual health, menopause, endometriosis, vulva and vagina, and ovaries and uterus.

We write health information for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities. We use the term 'women', but we acknowledge that this term is not inclusive of all people who may use our content.



Feedback

We welcome all feedback and suggestions on how to improve this toolkit.

Send your feedback to education@jeanhailes.org.au



How to use this toolkit

This toolkit has been designed to help health professionals and other health workers educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women about the importance of annual health checks and cancer screenings. The presentation explains what they are, why they are important, and when women should have them.

This is available as a hard-copy flip chart or can be downloaded electronically as a presentation from our website jeanhailes.org.au

Using this presentation

Before using the presentation, we recommend you read it in full to ensure you understand it.


The presentation has been developed in consultation with several Aboriginal communities, but it might not be appropriate for your audience. We recommend you consult with knowledgeable people in the local community, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, liaison officers or community engagement workers, to ensure it is relevant and culturally appropriate.

Remember that much of the information in the presentation is considered 'women's business' and is regarded as sensitive and private to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

It should not be shared with or made available to men.

The presentation can be used in group sessions and one-on-one consultations. You may choose to deliver the full presentation, or just a few slides, depending on the type of session and the needs of the audience. The time required to deliver a presentation depends on the needs of the audience. Allow about 30 to 45 minutes to deliver the whole presentation.

When delivering the presentation in a group setting, a private space should be provided for the participants to attend. If you are using a tablet or laptop to deliver the presentation, we recommend printing the facilitator notes to refer to.



Further information

You can view and download additional resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from:

jeanhailes.org.au

Presentations

- Periods and the menstrual cycle
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

Booklets

- Health checks
- Periods
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

Animations

- Periods
- What is PCOS?
- How to stay healthy with PCOS

Poster

- Health checks

Useful websites

Australian Indigenous Health/*InfoNet*
healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au

Jean Hailes for Women's Health
jeanhailes.org.au

Australian Government Department of
Health and Aged Care
health.gov.au

Cancer Council Australia
cancer.org.au

Our Mob and Cancer
ourmobandcancer.gov.au

Today we will be talking about annual health checks and cancer screening tests:

- what they are
- why you need them
- when you need to have them
- how to get ready for them.



Health checks – stay healthy, stay strong

What is a health check?

A health check is when a health carer checks your overall health. The health carer could be a doctor, nurse or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker or Practitioner.

At the health check, the health carer will ask you about your health and lifestyle. They might do some tests using special tools or equipment.

What is a 715 health check?

It's a free health check specifically designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of all ages. You can get this health check for free once a year at your local clinic.

What is a health check?

A health check means a health carer checks if your health is good.

There is a free health check for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people known as a 715 health check.



Why do you need a 715 health check?

Have a health check to:

- check if you're healthy and well
- find any health problems early and get treatment
- help prevent illness in the future
- check if you're getting the right medication and care (if you're sick or have a chronic condition)
- get information on how to stay well (e.g. what exercise to do and what foods to eat)
- ask a health carer any questions about your health.

How often do you need to have a 715 health check?

Have a health check once a year even if you feel healthy and strong. You might need to have them more often if you have a chronic disease, like diabetes or heart or kidney disease.

When you have regular health checks, you can find out about health problems sooner, before they get worse, and get the right help.

Why do you need a 715 health check?

Have this health check every year to:

- check if you're healthy and well
- find any health problems early
- help prevent illness in the future
- learn how to take care of your health.



What happens at a 715 health check?

At the health check, the health carer might check your blood pressure, blood sugar levels, height and weight. They may check if your heart and kidneys are strong and healthy.

They will also talk to you about:

- any illness or treatment you have or had in the past (it's called 'medical history')
- the health of your close family members – if they have or had a chronic disease or health problem, like a heart attack, diabetes, kidney disease, cancer or depression
- any pain or unusual changes in your body
- how you are feeling (e.g. if you've been sad or worried for some time)
- what you eat, how much you exercise or move during a day, and if you smoke or drink alcohol
- how to look after your health.

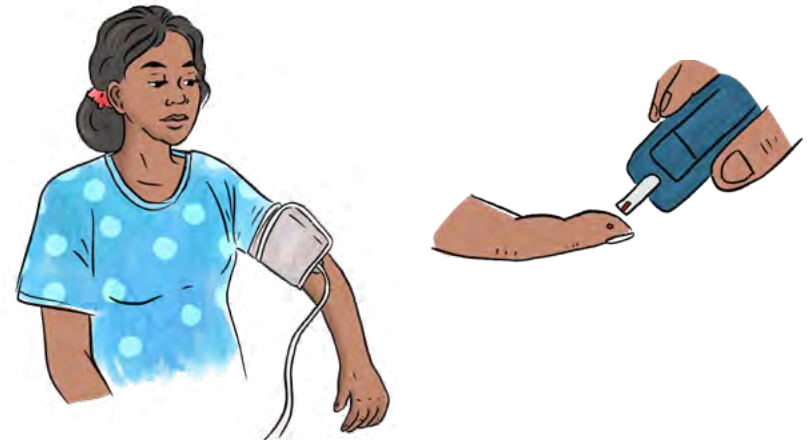
It's important to tell the health carer anything that worries you about your health. They will not judge you. It's safe to share your medical history and lifestyle with them so you can get the best care possible.

The health carer may also suggest other tests or services to help you (for example, for your heart, vision or mental health).

What happens at a 715 health check?

The health carer may:

- check your blood pressure and blood sugar levels
- ask you about your medical history and lifestyle
- ask you how you feel and if you have any pain or unusual changes in your body.



Is every health check the same?

No. The type of health check you get will depend on your age, health and risk of developing a chronic disease. Some important tests you might have at your health check are:

- blood pressure and heart health check
- blood tests for cholesterol, diabetes and kidney disease.

Most of these tests start from the age of 18 and are usually done every 1 to 5 years. A health carer will tell you what tests you need.

Is every health check the same?

The type of health check you get will depend on your age and health.



National cancer screening tests

Are there any other important tests to have?

Apart from your 715 health checks, there are other important tests you should have regularly. These tests help find cancer early, even before you feel sick.

The three national cancer screening tests for women are:

- cervical screening test for women 25 to 74 years old
- breast screen for women 50 to 74 years old
- bowel cancer screening test for people 50 to 74 years old.

Other important tests to have

There are important cancer screening tests you should have regularly.

They help find cancer early, even before you feel sick.

NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAM

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

BreastScreen
AUSTRALIA

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

NATIONAL BOWELCANCER SCREENING PROGRAM

Why is it important to find cancer early?

If cancer is found early, it will be smaller and easier to treat. This way, you'll have a better chance to get strong and healthy again to enjoy your life and family.

Do the cancer screening tests regularly to find cancer early.

Why is it important to find cancer early?

Finding cancer early gives you a much better chance to get well again to enjoy your life and family.





NATIONAL --- **CERVICAL SCREENING** --- PROGRAM

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

What is cervical cancer?

It's cancer that grows in the cervix, which is the entrance to the womb.* It's one of the easiest types of cancer to prevent.

What causes cervical cancer?

- A common virus called HPV can cause cervical cancer.
- You can get HPV from someone during sex.

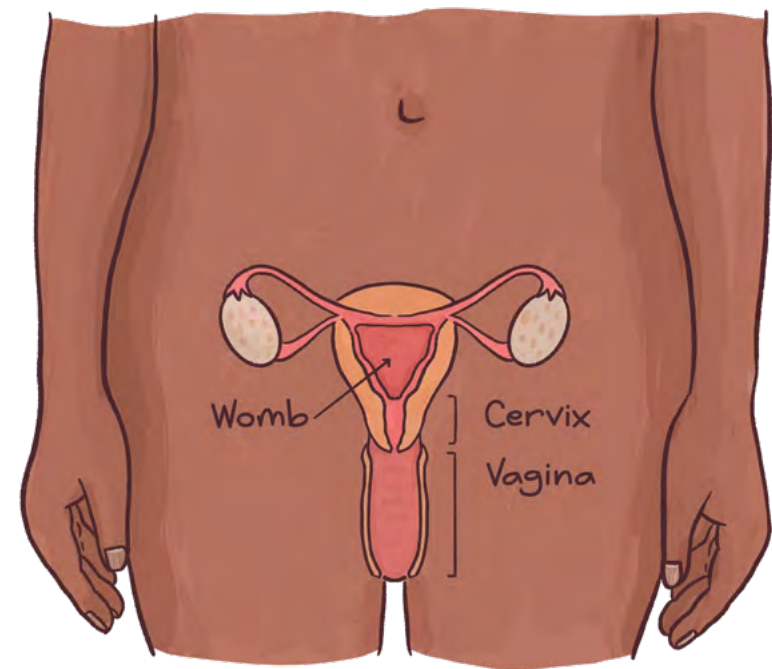
An HPV vaccine is available for people aged 9 to 25. Children aged 12 and 13 can get the vaccine for free through their schools. Talk to a health carer for more information about this vaccine.

**Note to the facilitator: Refer to the image.*

What is cervical cancer?

It's cancer that grows in the cervix, which is the entrance to the womb.

A common virus called HPV is usually the cause of cervical cancer.



What is a cervical screening test?

- A cervical screening test checks if you have HPV.
- A health carer will gently take a sample of cells from your cervix with a swab. This will be quick and shouldn't hurt.
- If you prefer, you can take a sample from your vagina yourself, in a private space. Ask the health carer if it's an option for you and how to do it.*
- Your cell sample is then sent to a laboratory for testing.
- The health carer will talk to you about your results.

If you have this test regularly, it's your best protection against getting cervical cancer.

**Note to the facilitator: Consider printing the 'How to collect your own sample' brochure for the participants, using the following link*

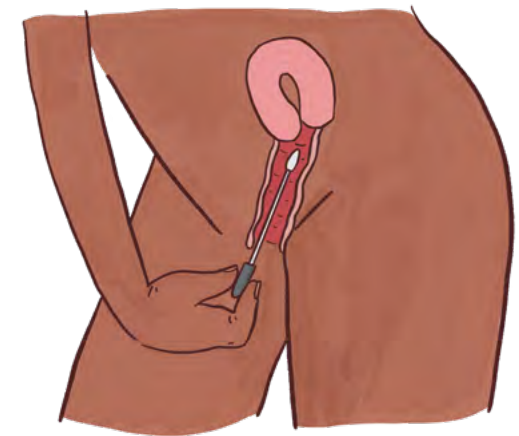
www.health.gov.au/NCSP-First-Nations

What is a cervical screening test?

It's a test that checks if you have HPV.

A health carer can take a sample from your cervix, or you can take a sample from your vagina yourself.

This test is your best protection against getting cervical cancer.



When to have a cervical screening test

- If you have a cervix, have ever had sex and are between 25 and 74 years old, have a cervical screening test every 5 years.
- If you don't know when you need to have your next test, ask a health carer.

Where can you have this test?*

You can have this test at:

- your local clinic
- a family planning clinic
- a sexual health clinic.

Having a cervical screening test every 5 years can save your life.

**Note to the facilitator: Give examples of the local clinics and centres where women can have this test.*

When to have a cervical screening test

Have a cervical screening test when you turn 25. Then do the test every 5 years.



What if you think something is wrong?

If something is happening with your body that is not normal for you, like:

- unusual bleeding from your vagina
- unusual discharge (liquid) from your vagina
- pain in your vagina or lower belly
- pain during or after having sex.

you need to see a health carer as soon as you can.

Don't wait until your next cervical screening test.

What if you think something is wrong?

If you're bleeding or have unusual discharge or pain, see a health carer.

Don't wait until your next cervical screening test.





BreastScreen

AUSTRALIA

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

What is breast cancer?

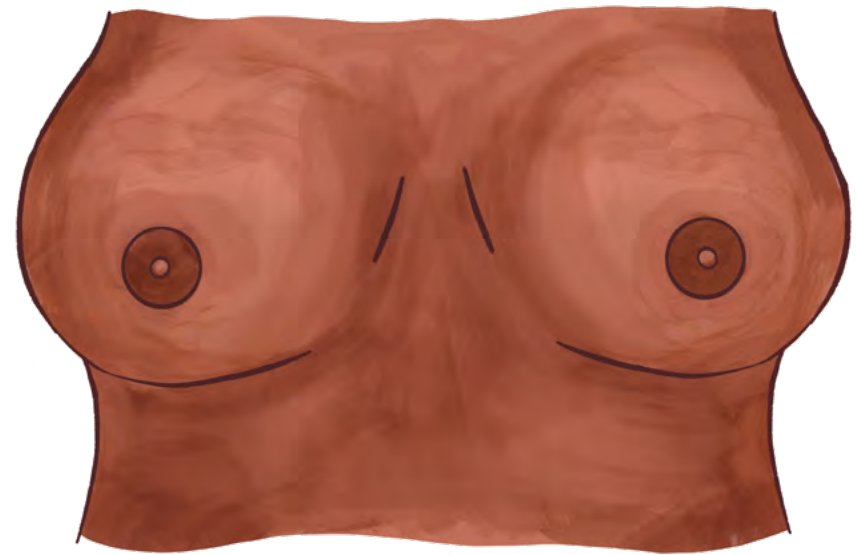
- It's cancer that grows in the breast.
- It's the most common cancer among women in Australia.

It can develop at any age but is more common in women aged 50 and over.

What is breast cancer?

It's cancer that grows in the breast.

It's the most common cancer among women in Australia.



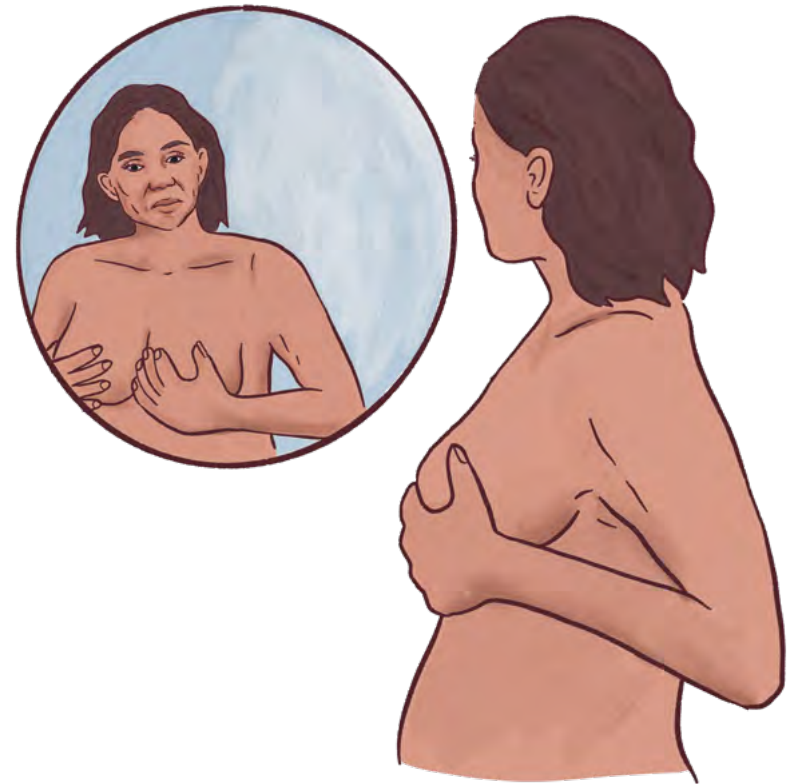
What can you do to find breast cancer early?

To find cancer early:

- Get to know your breasts well so you can notice if there is a change in either of them.
- Look at your breasts (in the mirror if possible) and feel them to learn what they normally look and feel like.
- Check your breasts regularly for any changes in them.

How to find breast cancer early

Get to know your breasts and check them regularly for any unusual changes.



How to check for changes in your breasts

- Check your breasts once a month (e.g. when showering, getting dressed or lying down).
- Look at the shape, colour and size of your breasts.
- Feel your breasts from your collarbone to below the bra line and under your armpits.
- Watch out for:
 - lumps or thickening
 - redness
 - pain
 - nipple discharge
 - changes in the size or shape, especially of only one breast
 - changes to the skin or nipple.

There is no right or wrong way to check your breasts – find a way that works for you and do it regularly.

Most changes in the breast are not breast cancer. But if you notice any change, have it checked by a health carer as soon as possible.

How to check for changes in your breasts

Once a month, look at your breasts and feel for anything unusual, like:

- lumps
- pain
- nipple discharge
- changes in the size or shape of your breasts.

Lumps



Changes in size or shape



Redness, pain or nipple discharge



Changes to skin or nipple



How else to check for breast cancer?

Another way to find changes in the breast early is to have a breast screen.

What is a breast screen?

A breast screen is a photo of the inside of your breasts. It shows changes that are too small to feel or see.

When to have a breast screen

- Have a breast screen every 2 years between the ages of 50 and 74.
- If you're younger than 50 or older than 74, ask a health carer if a breast screen is right for you.

Where to have a breast screen

BreastScreen Australia provides free breast screens in all states and territories for women with no breast symptoms. Breast screens in rural and remote areas are done by mobile screening vans.

Call 13 20 50 to find a BreastScreen service near you and to book your appointment.

Another way to check for breast cancer

Have a breast screen every 2 years from the age of 50.

BreastScreen Australia does free breast screens all over the country.

Call 13 20 50 to find a service near you.





NATIONAL **BOWEL**CANCER

SCREENING PROGRAM

What is the bowel?

The bowel is part of your digestive system*. It's the tube in your tummy that takes the food from your stomach through to your anus (where you poo from).

What is bowel cancer?

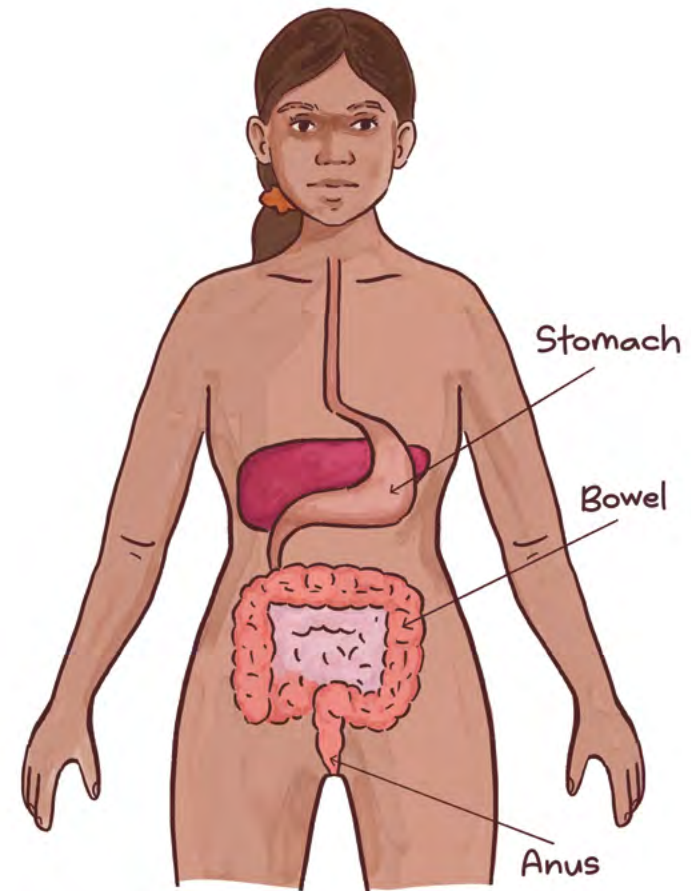
It's cancer that grows in the bowel. Unfortunately, it often develops without any symptoms.

**Note to the facilitator: Use the image if you want to briefly explain the digestive system.*

What is bowel cancer?

It's cancer that grows in the bowel.

It can develop without any symptoms, so you may not know you have it.



What to look out for

Even though bowel cancer usually has no symptoms at the beginning, you should look out for these changes:

- There is blood in your poo.
- Your poo has become different from what it normally is (e.g. it's harder, looser or has a different shape).
- You're having tummy pain, bloating or cramping.
- You can feel pain or a lump in your anus.
- You're tired a lot and you don't know why.
- You're losing weight and you don't know why.

If you notice any of these changes, it doesn't mean you have bowel cancer, but you should see a health carer as soon as possible.

What to look out for

See a health carer if:

- there is blood in your poo
- you have tummy pains
- you're tired a lot
- you're losing weight.



What is the bowel cancer screening test?

- It's a free test that checks for blood in your poo, which can be an early sign of bowel cancer.
- This test is the best way to find bowel cancer early.
- Do the test every 2 years between the ages of 50 and 74.

What is the bowel cancer screening test?

It's a free test that checks for blood in your poo.

It's the best way to find bowel cancer early.

Do the test every 2 years between the ages of 50 and 74.



How to get the bowel cancer screening test

- The test is sent to your home address when you turn 50 and every 2 years after that if you're registered with Medicare.
- If you don't get the test, ask your local clinic for one or call the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program on 1800 627 701.

How will you know how to do the test?

- The test is easy for you to do at home. It comes with instructions that show you exactly what to do. You can also ask a health carer how to do the test.
- Usually, the results are sent to you within four weeks after doing the test.

How to get the test

The test is sent to your home when you turn 50 and every 2 years after that.

You can also get it at your local clinic.

The test is easy for you to do at home.



How to keep your bowel healthy

- Have a healthy weight.
- Eat a healthy diet (like bush tucker) – more vegetables, fruit and wholegrains, less red meat and processed foods – and avoid sugary drinks.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Be physically active – move, walk, dance.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol – a health carer can tell you how to quit smoking and drink less alcohol.
- Do a bowel cancer screening test.

How to keep your bowel healthy

- Have a healthy weight.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Be active.
- Avoid smoking and drinking alcohol.
- Do a bowel cancer screening test.





Sexual health checks and STI tests

What is a sexual health check?

A sexual health check is a visit to a health carer to:

- talk about safe sex – how to protect yourself against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- talk about contraception and your right to decide if you do or don't want to get pregnant
- talk about your rights when you're in a relationship with someone
- talk about fertility
- get a cervical screening test if you're due for one
- have a test for STIs.

What is a sexual health check?

It's a visit to a health carer to:

- talk about things like safe sex, contraception and fertility issues
- get tested for STIs.



What are STIs?

STIs means 'sexually transmitted infections'. They are infections that you can get if you:

- have vaginal, oral or anal sex with someone
- share needles that have someone's blood on them (e.g. when using drugs or getting tattoos or piercings).

STIs are common all around the world. There are many different STIs, such as:

- genital herpes
- chlamydia
- gonorrhoea
- syphilis
- hepatitis B and C
- HIV.

If STIs are not treated, they can cause:

- irritation and pain
- problems with pregnancy or getting pregnant
- serious health problems.

What are STIs?

STIs are infections you can get from any sexual contact with another person.

If left untreated, STIs can cause serious health problems.



Can you tell if someone has an STI?

Sometimes, STIs don't cause visible symptoms, so you can't tell just by looking at a person if they have an STI.

Even if a person looks strong and healthy, they can still have an STI and pass it on to another person.

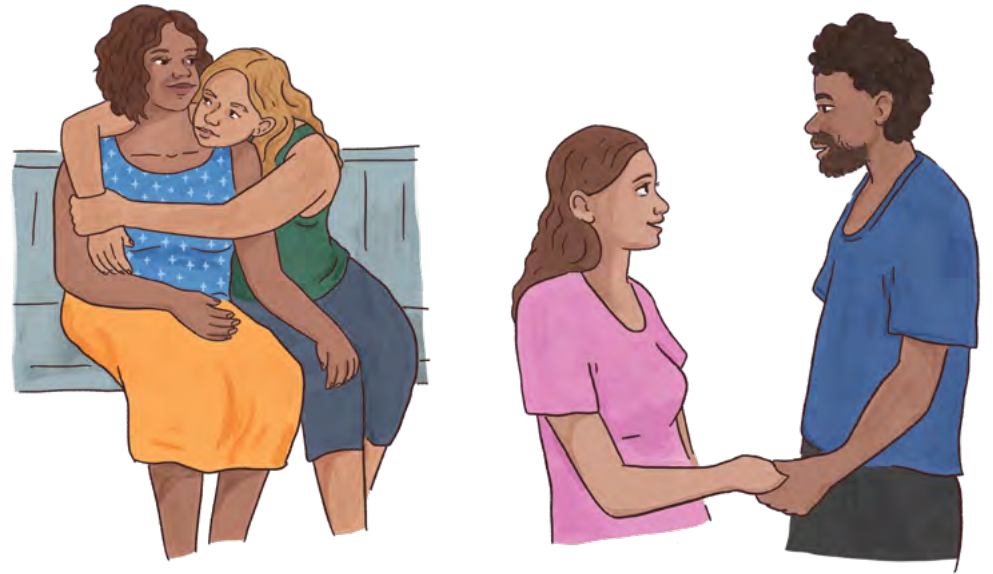
It's also possible to have an STI and not even know about it.

Some possible symptoms of STIs are:

- sores, blisters, or broken skin on vulva, penis, anus or mouth
- unusual liquid coming out of vagina, penis or anus
- vulva or vagina looks red, hurts, is itchy or smells bad
- lumps and bumps on penis, vulva, vagina or anus
- pain or bleeding during sex
- pain when weeing.

Can you tell if someone has an STI?

You can't tell if someone has an STI just by looking at them.
People may have an STI and look healthy.



How to find out if you have an STI

- The only way to find out if you have an STI is to get tested.
- Tests for STIs are simple, free and safe. You might need to give a wee sample or have a vaginal examination. Sometimes, you may need to have a throat swab, anal swab or blood test.
- If the test shows you have an infection, you can start treatment straight away. This will help you get better sooner and stop you from giving the infection to someone else.

When do you need to have an STI test?

If you're having sex, have an STI test every year. You'll also need a test if:

- you or your recent sexual partners have symptoms
- you are starting a new sexual relationship
- you had sex without a condom (e.g. a condom broke or fell off during sex)
- you or your partner have sex with other people
- you share needles with other people.

Where do you go for an STI test?*

You can have an STI test at:

- your local clinic
- a sexual health clinic
- a family planning clinic.

What if you feel shame?

If you feel shame about having an STI test, remember that health carers:

- won't judge you
- do the tests every day and it's their job to look after you
- won't share your information with anyone.

If you are worried about your privacy, you can go to a different clinic (if possible).

** Note to the facilitator: Indicate where sexual health checks are available locally.*

How to find out if you have an STI

Get tested for STIs every year.

You can do it at:

- your local clinic
- a sexual health clinic
- a family planning clinic.

Tests for STIs are simple,
free and safe.

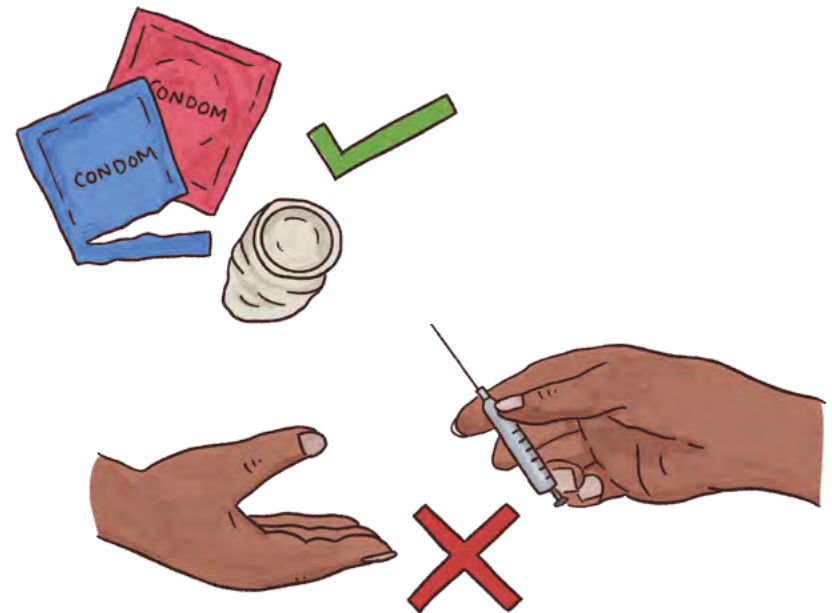


How to avoid getting an STI

- Use condoms every time you have sex, even if you have your period (menstruation).
- Get tested for STIs regularly.
- Before you have sex with someone new, have an STI test and ask them to have one too.
- Don't share needles, tattoo equipment, razors, or other things that may have someone's blood on them.

How to avoid getting an STI

- Use condoms.
- Have STI tests regularly.
- Ask your partner to have an STI test.
- Don't share things that may have blood on them, like needles.



What is chlamydia?*

It's a very common STI. Most women who have chlamydia have no symptoms, so they don't know they have it.

Possible symptoms are:

- a change in vaginal discharge
- pain during sex
- bleeding between periods or after sex
- burning feeling when weeing
- pain, discharge or bleeding from anus.

Symptoms that men might have are:

- discharge from penis
- pain or swelling of testicles.

Chlamydia can cause serious health problems if left untreated, such as:

- chronic pelvic pain
- problems with pregnancy
- miscarriage
- premature birth
- infertility
- passing chlamydia on to a newborn baby.

Chlamydia is easy to treat with antibiotics. Get your wee tested for chlamydia every year, especially if you're 30 or younger.

**Note to the facilitator: This slide might not be relevant to all audiences.*

What is chlamydia?

It's a common STI.

It often has no symptoms but can cause serious health problems.

Get tested for chlamydia every year.



What is syphilis?*

It's an STI that's increasing in Australia. Syphilis is caused by bacteria and can lead to serious health problems if left untreated. It's easy to cure if found early.

The symptoms of syphilis depend on the stage of disease. In the early stages, there might be painless sores on the penis, vagina, anus, mouth or throat. Later, the symptoms may include:

- a red rash on the palms, soles, chest or back
- sore throat, headaches, pain in the bones, muscles and joints
- ulcers in the mouth, nose or on genitals
- hair loss
- weight loss.

Untreated syphilis can damage different body parts and cause serious health problems. Syphilis during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, premature birth or stillbirth, and it can be passed on to the baby.

Get your blood tested for syphilis every year. It is especially important if you're pregnant.

Syphilis can be treated with penicillin.

**Note to the facilitator: This slide might not be relevant to all audiences.*

What is syphilis?

It's an STI caused by bacteria and can lead to serious health problems if left untreated.

Get tested for syphilis every year.



A clinic appointment

What if you don't feel confident going to the clinic?

There are things you can do to make yourself feel more confident at your clinic appointment:

- Ask to see a female health carer.
- Take a family member or a friend with you.
- Ask for an interpreter if you prefer to talk in your language.
- Prepare for your appointment before you go.

How to feel more confident at the clinic

- Ask to see a female health carer.
- Take someone with you.
- Ask for an interpreter if you need one.
- Prepare for the appointment.



How to prepare for your appointment

At the appointment, the health carer will ask you about:

- anything that worries you about your health
- all the medicines, vitamins and herbal remedies you're taking
- any medicines that you can't take
- any serious illnesses that you or other members of your close family have had
- any questions you want to ask them
- anything else you want to talk about.

It's a good idea to think about these things before your appointment.

How to prepare for an appointment

Before your appointment,
think about:

- anything that worries you about your health
- medicines you're taking and any that you can't take
- any questions you want to ask.



At your appointment:

- Talk to the health carer about anything that worries you and answer their questions truthfully. They will not judge or criticise you, or share your information without your permission.
- If you don't understand something, ask the health carer to explain it again or write it down for you.
- If you're not comfortable with the treatment the health carer gives you, ask if there are other treatments you could try.

At your appointment

- Talk openly with the health carer.
- If you don't understand something, ask them to explain it again or write it down.
- If you don't like the treatment, ask if there's a different one.



For further information contact

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East Melbourne VIC 3002

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Email education@jeanhailes.org.au

Website jeanhailes.org.au

Disclaimer: This resource is designed to be informative and educational and does not replace medical advice. Women should consult a health carer if they feel unwell or notice any changes in their bodies that are not normal for them.

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Created June 2023