

# factsheet

# TAKING CARE OF YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH

If you are sexually active it is important to have regular sexual health check.

## What is a sexual health check?

A sexual health check is a visit with a health professional to test for sexually transmissible infections (STIs) and discuss any sexual health concerns, including contraception and safer sex practices.

## Where do I go for a sexual health check?

It depends on where you live and what services are close to you. A sexual health check is carried out by a health worker - your local GP, a doctor or nurse at a Sexual Health Centre, a Youth Health Centre, or a Family Planning Australia Clinic.

Check out where services are in your area or see the 'For more information' section at the end of this factsheet.

## Who needs a sexual health check?

Anyone who is sexually active should speak with a health professional about when and how often they should be tested. A check-up is especially recommended if:

- you think that you might have an STI
- you have had sex without a condom, including vaginal, oral and/or anal sex
- you have had a condom break or fall off during sex
- your partner has another sexual partner
- you have more than one sexual partner
- you have shared needles for drugs, tattooing or piercing
- you are starting a new sexual relationship

## What happens at a sexual health check?

A health worker will usually begin by taking a sexual history. Some of the questions they will ask may seem quite personal.

Some of the questions may include:

- who have you had sex with in the last 3 months?
- what sexual activities have you engaged in?
- do you have sex with people with a penis, a vagina or both?
- when was the last time you had sex without a condom?
- do you have any symptoms which could suggest an STI?
- have you injected drugs and/or shared injecting equipment?
- do you have any tattoos or body piercings?
- have you had a hepatitis B vaccination?

You might feel uncomfortable when answering these questions, but it is important you give true answers so that you get the best advice and be given the right tests to keep you healthy.

All the information you give the health worker is confidential and kept private.

A sexual health check may not always require an examination. Often a urine test and blood test is all that is needed.

Depending on your situation, other tests may be recommended, including:

- swabs from the throat or rectum (inside the anus)
- swab from the penis (if there is a discharge)
- swab from the vagina or cervix (can be collected by yourself or the healthcare professional)

The doctor or nurse may also suggest having a cervical screening test. This is recommended for every five years for women and people with a cervix aged over 25 years to help prevent cancer of the cervix. It includes a swab of the vagina or cervix and may be taken at the same time as swabs for infection.



If your test shows you have an infection, the health worker may mention 'contact tracing'.

'Contact tracing' is the process of identifying partners with whom a person has had recent sexual contact, to make sure that everyone who might have been exposed to an infection gets tested and treated. The health worker will discuss the best way to do this depending on each situation. There are useful websites to help with this (see resources at the end of this factsheet).

## Asking questions

A visit to a health professional is a great opportunity to ask any questions you have about your sexual health or to discuss anything that has been worrying you.

A good health professional will encourage you to ask questions. It's important that you feel like you are able to ask any questions you have.

It's equally important that the health professional answers your questions and explains everything in a way that you are able to understand.

## What other questions could you ask?

Before your check-up, you might want to ask:

- is there a cost for a sexual health check?
- does this service bulk bill?
- can I be seen without a Medicare card?
- does your service provide STI testing and contraception?
- do you see young people without their parents?
- will you give me written information to help me understand?

Some of the questions you might like to ask during the check-up include:

- what exactly are the tests for?
- which STIs are being tested for?
- are the tests blood, urine or swab tests? Many people mistakenly think a blood test will cover everything
- if any of the tests are positive, do I have to tell anyone?
- will the health worker tell anyone?
- if any of the tests are positive, will that affect my future fertility, pregnancy or general health?
- will I need to have another test later?

## Feeling comfortable

Your comfort and safety are important.

If you feel uncomfortable with your health professional, you might like to ask to see a different doctor or nurse, bring a support person with you, or try another service.

## Acknowledgements

The information provided here has been adapted from content taken from the Queensland Government Sexual Health website for young people - [www.istaysafe.com](http://www.istaysafe.com) and the NSW Government STI Testing tool

## For more information

- Visit your nearest Family Planning Australia clinic [fpnsw.org.au/clinics](http://fpnsw.org.au/clinics)
- Chat to a nurse via Talkline – 1300 658 886 or [fpnsw.org.au/talkline](http://fpnsw.org.au/talkline)
- National Relay Service (for people who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing or have speech communication difficulties) – 133 677
- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) – 131 450
- NSW Sexual Health Infolink – [shil.nsw.gov.au](http://shil.nsw.gov.au) or 1800 451 624
- Let Them Know – [letthemknow.org.au](http://letthemknow.org.au)