

### Core knowledge content

#### What is Sexual Health?

Sexual health is defined as a state of physical, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality. It is an integral aspect of an individual's identity, social wellbeing, and personal health ([World Health Organization](#)).

Sexual and reproductive health encompasses sex, reproduction, gender identities and roles, consent, sexual orientation, breast health, menopause, contraception, STI, unintended pregnancy, abortions, infertility, men's health, and sexual dysfunction.

Sexual health encompass sexual orientation and gender identity, sexual expression, relationships, and pleasure. Sexuality is a central aspect of being human and education is required across the lifespan.

The ability of individuals to achieve sexual health and well-being depends on their:

- Access to comprehensive, good-quality information about sex and sexuality
- Knowledge about the risks they may face and their vulnerability to adverse consequences of unprotected sexual activity
- Ability to access sexual health care
- Living in an environment that affirms and promotes positive sexual health

To be sexually healthy, every time you engage in sexual activity you should:

- Feel comfortable with yourself, your partner and the decisions you make.
- Be able to talk about it candidly with your partner.
- If you are about to do something that makes you uncomfortable, stop before you start.
- When the decision is made to become sexually active, partners need to discuss which preventative measures they will use. The use of condoms provides dual protection, since it is important that you minimize the risk of sexually transmitted infections.

#### Becoming Sexually Active

Sexual health is a big deal - as big as your overall physical health.

# Teaching Tool

## Grade 7: Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Being sexually healthy means that you are free from disease, violence, injury, fear and false beliefs. It also means that you are comfortable with your sexuality, and have the ability to control and positively experience your own sexuality and reproduction.

Becoming sexually active and not being ready physically, emotionally, mentally, etc., can have consequences. Also, sexual health-related issues are wide-ranging, and includes STIs and unplanned pregnancy. It is important to know how to make decisions that will protect you and keep you safe.

### **Behaviours that put people at risk of Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

Students should be able to identify behaviours that put them at risk for contracting sexual transmitted infections (STIs), including those that can be transmitted through blood. Alcohol and drugs have a significant effect on the decision to participate in high risk behaviour and also on proper condom usage. Drugs, including alcohol, may also suppress the immune system, which reduces one's resistance to infection.

Failure to properly diagnose and start treatment of any STI may lead to irreversible complications. The emotional toll of dealing with a lifelong illness can be difficult. The most devastating consequences of not treating any STI are sterility and even death.

Those at no risk are people who are abstinent (not having any intimate sexual contact) or those who are involved in a close relationships but use other forms of intimacy (no genital –genital contact; e.g. hugging, dry kissing, French kissing, massage, fantasizing, self-masturbation).

People at low risk are those who have intimate sexual contact and properly/consistently using a latex condom with a mutually monogamous, uninfected partner, including properly/consistently using latex condoms for oral sex.

People at high risk are those who are having intimate sexual contact but are having unprotected oral/vaginal/anal sex, using the same condom twice, sharing needles. Others who are at high risk are those that are unsure what their sexual limits will be and therefore are not prepared.

There are more than 50 STIs existing worldwide. The accompanying lessons focus on the most common ones. It is possible for the person to have no symptoms for periods of time.

# Teaching Tool

## Grade 7: Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

They may have an STI and not even know it. They can also pass it to another person without either person knowing it.

If bacteria causes a disease, it is usually to be treated with antibiotic medication. Some STI's that are bacterial include chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis. Some other infections that can be spread through sexual intercourse are bacterial vaginosis, pubic lice and scabies.

For viral infections, most remain in the body and only the symptoms can be treated. For some, medications can help slow the spread of the virus. For others, your body may be able to clear the virus on its own. STI's that are viral include genital herpes, genital warts (HPV), hepatitis B and HIV.

Below are descriptions of a sample of sexually transmitted infections. Please note that these are only some examples of STIs, but there are many different types of STIs.

**Note:** If sexually active, it is important for both consenting partners to get tested for STIs before engaging in any type of sexual contact and discuss their sexual history. Sexual health centres offer STI testing.

### Bacterial Infections

#### Chlamydia

Chlamydia is one of the most common sexually transmitted infection in Canada. It is caused by bacteria that are transmitted through unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex. It can also be passed on from mother-to-child during childbirth.

Although there are signs and symptoms for chlamydia, many people do not have any of them. You can still pass on the infection if you don't have any signs or symptoms. Symptoms differ in males and females. Incidence rates of chlamydia are on the rise.

#### Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is another common sexually transmitted infection in Canada. It is caused by bacteria that are transmitted through unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex. Gonorrhea can infect different areas of the body, including the penis, rectum, throat, eyes or cervix. It can also be passed on from mother-to-child during childbirth. Gonorrhea is treatable with antibiotics.

# Teaching Tool

## Grade 7: Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Although there are signs and symptoms for gonorrhea, many people do not have any of them. You can still pass on the infection if you don't have any signs or symptoms. Symptoms differ in males and females.

### Bacterial Infections

**Table 1: Bacterial Infections: Chlamydia/Gonorrhea**

Infection	Treatment	Transmission	Symptoms	Complications
Most common <u>bacterial</u> STIs in the world	Curable with antibiotics	Unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex	Watery, milky, red or green discharge from the penis	Infertility
In Canada, the majority of cases are aged 15-24	For bacterial STIs, treatment should occur simultaneously (both partners treated at same time)	Infected fluid contact with mucous membranes (e.g. eye)  Mother to child during childbirth	Pain or swelling of the testicles  Unusual discharge from the vagina or anus  Bleeding/spotting between periods  Bleeding or pain during or after sex  Increase in pain during menstruation  Lower abdominal pain  Burning and/or pain when urinating  Itchy urethra  watery, milky, red or green discharge from the penis  Pain or swelling of the testicles  Many do not have symptoms	Newborn - blindness  Pelvis Inflammatory Disease (PID)  Infertility  Chronic pelvic pain  Ectopic pregnancy

### Viral Infections

**Table 2: Viral Infections: Genital Herpes**

Infection	Treatment	Transmission	Symptoms
Genital Herpes belongs to the herpes simplex family of viruses (cold sores, chickenpox, and shingles)	No cure Can use medication to reduce pain/discomfort and duration of outbreak	<p>Vaginal, oral, anal, sexual contact (with or without symptoms present)</p> <p>Intercourse is not needed for transmission as it can be transmitted via intimate skin to skin contact</p> <p>If a mother has genital sores during childbirth, herpes can be passed to the baby – severe CNS damage and/or death</p> <p>Cold sores are a form of the herpes virus. If a cold sore comes into contact with someone's genitals (oral sex) there is a risk for development of genital herpes</p>	<p>Symptoms are the same for both people with a vagina and people with a penis</p> <p>Tingling or itching of the skin around the genitals</p> <p>One or a group of painful, watery blisters in or around the genitals, or wherever there is skin to skin contact (hips, nipples, anus)</p> <p>These blisters break and form painful open sores that crust or scab lasting 7-21 days</p> <p>Burning/painful urination</p> <p>Flu-like symptoms (usually during the outbreak)</p> <p>Tender, swollen glands in the groin</p> <p>Outbreaks of herpes vary and can return as often as every month or as rarely as once a year or longer</p> <p>Stress, illness, diet, fever, sun exposure, menstruation, pregnancy or vigorous sex may cause outbreaks</p>

# Teaching Tool

## Grade 7: Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

**Table 3: Viral Infections: Genital Warts (HPV)**

<b>Infection</b>	<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Transmission</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>	<b>Complications</b>
HPV-Most common STI in the world. 85% of Canadians will have one kind of HPV infection in their lifetime  Over 100 types-can cause different problems (e.g. skin warts, genital warts, pre - cancerous lesions, or cancer)	No cure  Warts may be removed temporarily  Vaccine available	Through direct skin to skin contact or unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex	Warts may be round, flat or raised small cauliflower-like bumps that are flesh/grey coloured  Warts can be single or in clusters  Warts can be found in and around the genital area i.e. penis, scrotum, vaginal walls, cervix, vulva and anus  Itchy or irritated; bleeding	Oral, penile, anal cancer (for people born with a male reproductive system)  Oral, anal, cervical cancer (for people born with a female reproductive system)

**Table 4: Viral Infections: Hepatitis B**

Infection	Treatment	Transmission	Symptoms	Complications
Virus targets the liver and causes inflammation	No cure  Vaccine available	Contact with blood, semen or vaginal secretions of an infected person.  Unprotected vaginal, oral, anal sex  From an infected mother to an unborn baby  Use or re-use of needles or syringes with traces of the blood of an infected person (i.e. tattooing, sharing needles, piercing)  Exposure to infected blood or blood products  Exposure to infected blood by sharing personal items (i.e. razors, toothbrushes) – low risk  Saliva from an infected person to another person through a break in the skin/mucous membrane	Symptoms are the same for both males and females:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fever</li> <li>• nausea</li> <li>• weight loss/ loss of appetite</li> <li>• jaundice which means yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes</li> <li>• dark coloured urine, pale stool</li> <li>• skin rash</li> <li>• swollen glands</li> <li>• painful joints</li> <li>• fatigue</li> <li>• pain over liver (right side of abdomen)</li> </ul> 50% show no signs of infection	Most people recover 1-2% die 10% become carriers and may develop liver cancer, cirrhosis

**Table 5: Viral Infections: HIV**

Infection	Treatment	Transmission	Symptoms	Complications
Human Immunodeficiency Virus	No cure  Treatment has progressed dramatically and people who are HIV+ are living longer	Contact with blood, semen, vaginal secretions or breast milk  Unprotected vaginal, oral and anal sex  Sharing needles, syringes or other drug supplies with traces of the blood of an infected person (e.g., tattooing, sharing needles, piercing)  Pregnancy – from an infected mother to an unborn baby, infected breast milk, childbirth  Other blood exposure to infected blood/blood products (i.e. first aid)	It often takes many years for symptoms to appear.  HIV – infected people often have no symptoms and look and feel fine.  Some people with HIV will at some point develop symptoms like fatigue, loss of appetite, fever, night sweats etc.  AIDS – (occurs after the virus has damaged the immune system) People may have symptoms like extreme weight loss, unusual skin infections, pneumonias or cancers  AIDS can be delayed with proper follow-up care	HIV attacks the immune system resulting in a chronic, progressive illness that compromises a person immune system leaving them vulnerable to opportunistic infections and cancers  AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is fatal with no cure/vaccine available to date AIDS itself does not cause death, but it weakens the immune system so that a person's body cannot defend itself against other illnesses



### What if someone suspects an STI?

Individuals need to be aware of the importance of telling their sexual partners when there is a suspicion/confirmation of an STI, so that they can be assessed and then treated, if necessary.

If the STI is curable, treatment must commence immediately in order to prevent further spread of the disease and to prevent re-infection between partners.

Failure to properly diagnose and start treatment of any curable STI may lead to irreversible complications. The most devastating consequences of not treating any STI are infertility, sterility and even death.

### Prevention of STIs

Students need to be aware of how to prevent becoming infected with an STI. Ways of prevention include:

- Abstinence - no intimate sexual contact
- Open communication with partner
- Have a sexual relationship with one lifelong, uninfected partner (monogamous relationship)
- Health Check - both partners get checked for any STIs and wait for the results before engaging in any intimate sexual contact
- Always use latex condoms correctly and every time. Although not 100% effective, they do reduce the risk of infection
- Contraceptive protection and protection against STIs are not necessarily the same
  - The use of oral contraceptives (the pill) will not prevent the transmission of STIs
  - Dental dams are to be used during oral sex and can help protect against STIs.
- Reduce the number of sexual partners. As the number of sexual partners increases, so does the risk of STIs.
- Never share needles, tattoo equipment or personal care articles
  - Viruses can be passed through blood to blood contact on items such as razors or toothbrushes.
- Use routine practices when providing first aid, since exposure to infected body fluids can increase the risk of infection via open cuts or sores.

### Sources of Support

- Parents/guardian, other trusted adult family member (e.g. aunt, uncle, grandparent, godparent, step-parent)
- Teachers, counselors, CYWs, school nurse, religious leader
- Health care providers (Doctors, NP's, pharmacist,)
- Niagara Region Sexual Health Centres  
([https://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health\\_wellness/sexualhealth/sexual-health-centres.aspx](https://www.niagararegion.ca/living/health_wellness/sexualhealth/sexual-health-centres.aspx))
- Youth hotline (Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868; Youth Line (LGBTQ): 1-800-268-9688)
- Fact Sheets from a reliable source (Health Services/Agency; [www.sexandu.ca/](http://www.sexandu.ca/))