



Testing and Support

Why get tested?

Getting tested means knowing you're looking after your sexual health as best as you can, which is important for you and your sexual partners. Most STIs can be cured with medication and those that can't can be managed. But to manage or cure your STI you need to know you have it. The earlier it is treated the easier it will be to treat and the less long term damage it will cause.

When should I get Tested?

If you've never had a test before Condoms are really effective at preventing HIV & STIs, however, they're not always 100% effective. Unfortunately, just because you don't have symptoms doesn't mean you're in the clear. Many people carry sexual infections without knowing it. They can still pass them on and can still get ill from them in the future. Getting tested will give you the reassurance that you are taking care of your sexual health.

If something happened recently

Did the condom break, slip off or spill? Maybe you didn't have a condom handy, or you were drunk or high and forgot. If it happened in the last 72 hours, check out information on PEP. Regardless of the reason and even if the guy says he hasn't got any STIs – get tested for your own peace of mind.

If you develop symptoms

Not all STIs will give you symptoms but if you notice something different, get tested.

Symptoms of STIs include:

Pain when urinating or ejaculating

Discharge from penis or vagina

Pain during sex

Blisters or sores on genitals

Itching

Rash

Bleeding during or after sex

It might not be an STI but best to check it over at a sexual health clinic.

Starting a new relationship

You should only stop using condoms, when you're both sure that you are free of any STIs. Some sexual infections are harder to catch than others and can go undetected for longer periods, not all STIs have symptoms. The only way to be completely sure is for both of you to get tested.

If a previous sex partner or sexual health clinic get in touch with you.

If a previous partner has tested positive for HIV or an STI, they might get in touch with you or have given your details to their sexual health service so they can get in touch on their behalf. Don't panic – getting one of these calls doesn't mean you definitely have something, but you should get tested just in case.

What happens at the clinic?

Depending on which clinic you attend some elements of the process might be different from one service to another but generally, you can expect the following:

Arriving

Some clinics need you to phone in advance to make an appointment. You can find out more information on your local sexual health clinic to check whether you can drop-in or need an appointment.

Try not to pass urine for at least an hour before going to the clinic as you'll probably need to give a urine sample.

You will complete a form which will ask you some personal details and why you have attended today i.e. if you have symptoms or not. This is to ensure you go to the right person at the clinic.

Your information is kept in confidence. There may be times when confidentiality cannot be kept if they think you are at risk of harm. They will discuss this with you.

Having a chat about your sexual history

The doctor or nurse will ask you some questions about your sexual activity, experiences, and symptoms. Answer as honestly as you can so they can work out which tests to do and what treatment to offer.

Staff are very experienced and provide professional and non-judgemental care. There may be questions about things that might not be relevant to you, such as types of sex, drug use or whether you were paid/have paid for sex. Don't be offended – everybody is asked these questions to make sure that they have the opportunity to talk about them if they do apply to them.

Getting Tested

There are several ways to test for an STI, depending on your symptoms and the type of sexual contact you've had. In more and more services, you can take the test yourself.

Urine sample- (you will take this yourself)

Blood sample- a nurse will take a sample from your arm

Swabs – taken from your genitals, throat and/or rectum. (In some services, you might be able to take the swab yourself).

Taking a look – usually at your genitals. If you haven't had any symptoms, you don't usually need to be examined.

Results

Every clinic is different when it comes to results. When you get tested, the doctor or nurse will explain when and how you'll get the results. You may have to go back to the clinic to get them, or you may be able to receive them by phone or text. The doctor or nurse will also tell you what will happen next.

What happens next?

If your test comes back negative – that's it! You don't have an STI. Your doctor or nurse will have explained to you about the window period for STIs and HIV and may encourage you to come back if you need to re-test.

If you test comes back positive – it is not the end of the world. Almost all STIs can now be cured or managed effectively, including HIV. Your nurse or doctor will give you all the information and advice you need about getting the right treatment.

Counselling

If something is troubling you it can be worth spending some time thinking and talking about why this may be happening. Many of us face issues at various points through our life – it's important that we deal with them the best way we can. If you're experiencing any of the following, or want to explore something else you've been thinking about, it might be worth considering accessing a counselling / therapy service:

Lack of confidence: worried about failing, never feeling good enough, feeling judged.

Depression: feeling isolated, lonely, empty, tearful, unloved, suicidal.

Destructive behaviour: harming yourself, abusive relationships, alcohol, drugs.

Bereavement: loss, anger, loneliness, sadness & depression.

Relationship difficulties: partners, sexual and emotional intimacy issues, family and friends, colleagues, commitment, jealousy, abuse.

Family issues: partners, children, parenting, separation and divorce, homesickness.

Sex and sexuality: coming out to yourself and others, exploring your beliefs and attitudes to gay sex and the “scene”, exploring your sexual identity and how it affects your lifestyle choices, your HIV status.

There is a wide range of counselling services available to gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men. Below is a list of services that are available free of charge.