STI and STD basically mean the same thing. Sexually transmitted infection (STI) is the infection that is transmitted from person to person. Sexually transmitted disease (STD) is the disease that happens once a person is infected.

STIs are spread through genital-to-genital contact and through unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex. STIs can also spread from mother to baby during pregnancy and birth. Also, STIs don’t always cause any symptoms, so the infection can spread easily from one person to another without them knowing it.

Use condoms to protect yourself from STIs. Use condoms for vaginal, anal, and oral sex. Dental dams can also be used for oral sex. Remember that you’re only protected where you’re covered. Birth control pills will not protect you from STIs. Use a condom even if you or your partner is on the pill.

Bacterial STIs—such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis—can be cured with antibiotics. However, without treatment they can cause serious health problems, such as infertility and organ damage.

There is no cure for most viral STIs and they can be hard to treat.

- There is no cure for genital herpes or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), but there are treatments.
- Hepatitis B can cause serious liver disease, but there is a vaccine that can help prevent it.
- There is no treatment for human papillomavirus (HPV), but there are vaccines which can prevent infection. If left untreated, HPV can cause cervical cancer in women. It’s also linked to certain rare cancers in men.

STIs caused by parasites—like pubic lice (crabs)—can be cured.

- Lice and scabies can be treated with special creams, lotions, or shampoos.
- Trichomoniasis can be treated with antibiotics. If left untreated it can cause a very serious condition called pelvic inflammatory disease.
All women over 18 should get Pap tests. Pap tests detect changes to your cervix that can be caused by an HPV infection or cancer.

Stay healthy by getting tested for STIs. STI tests are not usually routinely offered. Talk to your healthcare provider and ask to get tested, especially:
- If you have had unprotected sex.
- If you or your partner are sexually active but have not been tested.
- Before you have sex with a new partner.
- If you have any signs or symptoms of an STI.
- If you were forced to have sex or you think you have been.

Your visit and your test results are confidential between you and your healthcare provider. If you have an STI your healthcare provider can tell you what your options are. Your sexual partner(s) will need to know so that they can be tested and get treated as well. You can choose to tell them yourself, or have your healthcare provider or local public health office tell them.

People who have many exclusive (monogamous) sexual relationships in a row are at high risk of STIs. People often don’t get tested for STIs in these relationships, so you don’t know if you or your partner has one. But because you’re only having sex with each other you might stop using condoms and put yourselves at risk.

Anyone can get an STI regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or anything else. However, First Nations youth have higher rates of STIs than other Canadians. There are many reasons for this, including poverty, difficulty getting healthcare, and having unprotected sex and using drugs.

**learn more...**

Canadian Federation for Sexual Health ➔ www.cfsh.ca

First Nations Centre at the National Aboriginal Health Organization ➔ www.naho.ca/fnc (under Publications)
- Sexual health toolkit part I: Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (2011)
- Sexual health toolkit part II: Sexuality and relationships (2011)

HPV Info ➔ www.hpvinfo.ca

Native Women’s Association of Canada ➔ www.nwac.ca/programs/sexually-transmitted-infections

Native Youth Sexual Health Network ➔ www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com

Public Health Agency of Canada ➔ www.phac-aspc.gc.ca

Sexuality and U ➔ www.sexualityandu.ca

Teaching Sexual Health ➔ www.teachingsexualhealth.ca