

# SAFER SEX

## FACT SHEET

**There is no guarantee that sex – like everything in life – will be 100% safe, regardless of how you have sex and who you have it with. If you decide you want to have sex, there are things we can do to make it safer for everyone involved.**

Safer sex is about more than preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy. It means:

- showing your partner/s respect
- you and your partner/s give and receive informed and enthusiastic consent
- you and your partner/s find the sexual activity pleasurable
- you and your partner/s are emotionally healthy
- not exploiting or harming other people

### What age can I have sex?

Check out our *Sexual health and the law for under 18s* Fact Sheet to learn more about what the law says about consent, sex and sexting.

### What is consent?

You must make sure you have agreement before you engage in any sexual activity with anyone; this is called gaining consent. Talk with your partner/s and agree together about what's OK for each of you. Consent is an ongoing process that needs to be maintained throughout sexual activity. This means checking in with your partner to see if they are still happy to go on. If at any time you or your partner/s are not into it, it's your/their right to stop at any time. It is against the law to have sex/continue sex with someone without their consent. This is called rape.

### Looking after yourself emotionally

It's important that if you decide to have sex, you only do something you feel comfortable with and that you are informed about. Talk about this with your partner/s, trusted friends and family or health professionals.

### Reducing the risk of STIs

STIs are infections which spread from person to person during unprotected vaginal, anal and/or oral sex. Sex toys can also spread STIs. You can reduce the risk of STIs by preventing the transfer of semen, vaginal fluids and anal mucus. To prevent the transfer of fluids you can use a barrier such as condoms or dams.

Condoms need to be on before sexual contact, and used properly to be effective. Condoms can be used on sex toys. Check out our information on condoms for more information on how to use them effectively.

Dams are latex sheets and can reduce the risk of STIs by covering the vulva or anus during oral sex. If you don't have a dam, you can cut open a condom and use it the same way. Use a new dam or condom when you change partners and/or body parts.

Using water-based lubricant decreases the chances of the condom breaking and getting cuts or abrasions (which can increase the risk of the infection spreading), plus it increases pleasure.

Condoms or dams won't protect against STIs if the infection is on an unprotected part of the body and skin-to-skin contact occurs.

### Other ways to reduce the risk of STI transmission

- Masturbation, massage, and cuddles can all be sensual and are all low risk activities.
- Keeping your fingernails short to avoid cuts and abrasions on the internal and external parts of your genitals that might increase the chances of infection spreading.
- Avoiding skin-to-skin contact when sores are present on your or your partner's mouth and or genitals (i.e. not kissing, giving or receiving oral sex or rubbing genitals together).
- Keep in mind that menstrual blood can transmit blood-borne viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis B and C, so make sure you take precautions if you or a partner has a blood-borne virus and have sexual activity during menstruation.

## How do I know if I have an STI?

If you have had unprotected sex with a new partner, or you think you might be at risk, have an STI check as soon as possible. Often there are no symptoms with an STI, so many people do not know they are infected. If you do have symptoms, they can feel like pain in the stomach, or pain when urinating. Some people might get unusual discharge from the penis or vagina, or sores or rashes on the genital area. The only way to be sure is to have an STI check.

**HIV and Hepatitis B can be prevented if you start treatment within 72 hours of unprotected sex. If you think you may have been exposed to HIV or Hepatitis B, call the PEP Hotline (open 24/7) on 1800 022 226.**

## Reducing the risk of unplanned pregnancy

Contraception reduces the risk of unplanned pregnancy, and there are lots of options to choose from. Before making a decision it's best to discuss the options with your doctor, or visit a community health centre or SHINE SA clinic. You can also call the SHINE SA Sexual Healthline and speak to an experienced sexual health nurse.

## Emergency contraception

If you had sex without a condom and are concerned about getting pregnant, you can take the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP). It's most effective if taken in the first 24 hours after unprotected sex, but you can take it up to 5 days (120 hours) after. ECP is available from most pharmacies, public hospital emergency departments, and SHINE SA clinics.

## What can I do if I think I might be pregnant?

If your period is late and you think you may be pregnant, you can take a pregnancy test. These tests only take a couple of minutes and are available at SHINE SA clinics, health centres, from your local doctor, pharmacies and some supermarkets. SHINE SA nurses, doctors and counsellors are non-judgmental and can talk you through your options if your pregnancy is unplanned.

## What can I do if I am sexually assaulted?

Sexual assault is any unwanted actions of a sexual nature that make you feel unsafe.

Sometimes you may not be sure if rape or sexual assault happened to you, but it's important to trust your gut feelings.

You have NOT said 'YES' to sex if:

- you were threatened or bullied into having sex
- you were asleep or unconscious
- you had been drinking or taking drugs and weren't aware of what was going on

Survivors/victims of sexual assault may feel guilt or shame and be afraid of how others will react. Remember that it's not your fault, and finding a safe person to tell may help you. There is support available.

## Further information and support

### Adelaide Sexual Health Centre

STI testing and treatment 7117 2800

### Yarrow Place

Rape and sexual assault service 8226 8777

### Youth Healthline

Counselling and information 1300 13 17 19

**[www.getcheckednow.com.au](http://www.getcheckednow.com.au)**

**If you're 16–30, you can go online to arrange a free, confidential STI test, without seeing your doctor.**

CONTACT  
SHINE SA

**SHINE**SA

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SHINE SA fact sheets are regularly reviewed and updated. To download the most recent version visit [www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)

## Clinic & Counselling Appointments and General Enquiries

Tel 1300 794 584

Clinic locations and times are available at [www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)

## Sexual Healthline

Tel 1300 883 793 **Country callers (toll free)** 1800 188 171

Talk to a sexual health nurse about any sexual health issue.

Available 9am – 12.30pm, Monday – Friday

## National Relay Service

[www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au)

133 677 (TTY/Voice) 1300 555 727 (Speak & Listen) 0423 677 767 (SMS Relay)