

Help Yourself Today to a Healthy and Safer Sex Life



FACT SHEET

For people who choose to be sexually active, sex can be a great experience. But everyone needs to think ahead to some of the results that can come from having sex.

HIV/AIDS. Predictions are that this almost always fatal disease of the immune system will continue to escalate over the next 10 years. Some factors in your past or present sex life, or whether and how you take street drugs, can expose you to greater risk. HIV/AIDS is caught by having sex with someone infected, or by sharing needles. You can be infected with HIV/AIDS without knowing it, and pass it on.

Chlamydia. A bacterial infection passed through sexual activity, chlamydia left untreated can cause major damage to a woman's reproductive system, make it harder for her to get pregnant, or increase her chances of having a dangerous ectopic (tubal) pregnancy. Chlamydia infection is now at epidemic levels in Canada. It can be tested for and treated. But it's often a silent infection – many men and women may not realize they're infected.

Gonorrhoea. This bacterial infection is still a major epidemic. It can cause the same problems as chlamydia, as well as other complications. Gonorrhoea usually creates more symptoms in men than in women but it, too, may be silent. It can be treated.

Syphilis. This bacterial infection is on the increase. If not treated, it can cause chronic illness and brain damage.

Herpes. An often-painful viral infection, herpes has no cure yet. It's not life threatening, but will mean major changes in your sexual behaviour. It may infect the cervix and increase a woman's chance of getting cervical cancer. It can also cause problems in pregnancy.

Genital Warts. Visible external genital warts can usually be treated, but may recur. The wart virus can infect the cervix in women and some strains of this virus are the main causes of cervical cancer. Warts in men or women may often be invisible without a special exam.

Pregnancy. Pregnancy is always a potential outcome of intercourse even if a couple uses birth control. Whatever your situation, any pregnancy requires a decision making process in which both parties must consider their options and the impact of a pregnancy on their lives, depending on the pregnancy option chosen. Given age, history, and health circumstances, some women may also face increased medical risks with a pregnancy.

If you want to know more about any of these risks to a healthy sex life, ask for our detailed information handouts.

SO—for a safer and healthier sex life...

- Know your partner's history. It's okay to ask.
- If you're not ready for pregnancy, use a reliable birth control method.
- Use a barrier method of birth control—a condom or a diaphragm—for protection against infection, not just pregnancy. (Since condoms can break, your best protection is to know your partner.)
- Monogamy is much safer than changing partners.
- Abstinence is safest of all—it's okay to say no.

