

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 unintended pregnancy. Safer sex 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 sex?

Sexual intercourse generally refers to penis-in-vagina or penis-in-anus sex. Sex however can be any kind of intimate contact including oral sex, mutual masturbation, the use of sex toys, sexting, phone sex and more. Sex can be whatever you and your partner/s want it to be and consent to.

It is important that if you decide to have sex or sexual activity, 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 a health professional.

What is consent?

Consent means to agree to do something or to give permission.

Some important things to remember about consent to sexual activity:

- Consent must be given freely without being pressured.
- Consent must be gained before sexual activity and be present throughout the activity.
- Just because someone does not say 'no', it does not mean that consent has been given.
- If someone gives consent to one type of sexual activity it doesn't mean that they consent to other sexual activities. 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 meaning that you check in with each other to see if you are both still happy to go on. If at any time you or your partner/s are uncomfortable, 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 never OK.

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, blood 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 also be used on sex toys. Condoms can be internal or external, internal condoms can be used for anal sex as well as vaginal sex. Check out our *Condoms* Fact Sheet for more information on how to use them effectively.

Dental 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 (lube) decreases the chances of the condom breaking and getting cuts or abrasions (which can increase the risk of the infection spreading). Using lubricant can also increase 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.

Condoms are the only contraceptive that will reduce the risk of STIs and pregnancy.

Other ways to reduce the risk of STI transmission

- Masturbation, massage and cuddles can all be sensual, low-risk activities.
- Keep your fingernails short to avoid cuts and abrasions on the internal and external parts of your genitals (cuts and abrasions may increase the chance of infection spreading).
- Use lubricant to prevent friction, particularly for anal sex.
- Avoid 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?

Often STIs have no symptoms so most people do not know they are infected. If you do have symptoms such as pain when urinating, pelvic pain, unusual discharge, sores or rashes on the genital area, then it's a good idea to get an STI check. The only way to be sure is to have regular STI checks.

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 unintended pregnancy

Contraception reduces the risk of unintended pregnancy and there are many contraceptive options to choose from. Before making a decision it's best to discuss the options with your doctor, a health centre or a SHINE SA clinic. You can also call SHINE SA's Sexual Healthline and speak to a health professional for free. To learn more about contraception read our *Choices in Contraception* Fact Sheet.

Emergency contraception

If you have 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 unintended. To learn more read our *Pregnancy Options* Fact Sheet.

What can I do if I'm sexually assaulted?

Sexual assault is any unwanted actions of a sexual nature.

Sometimes you may not be sure if rape or sexual assault happened to you, but it's important to trust your gut feelings if you think it has. Talking to a trusted adult, friend or health professional may help.

It is possible to be sexually assaulted by someone you know or are in a relationship with.

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 can 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. **In South Australia Yarrow Place is the lead rape and sexual assault service.**

Further information and support

Adelaide Sexual Health Centre	
STI testing and treatment	7117 2800
Yarrow Place	
Rape and sexual assault service	8226 8777
Pregnancy Advisory Centre	
Unintended pregnancy services	7117 8999
Kids Helpline	
Phone counselling service	1800 55 1800

CONTACT
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

Clinic & Counselling Appointments and General Enquiries

Tel 8300 5300

Clinic locations and times are available at 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

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