Key messages

- Some common STIs are gonorrhoea, chlamydia and syphilis. Some common BBVs are hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.
- STIs and BBVs are **completely preventable** through of **interventions ranging from immunisations to condoms**.
- There is **no shame** in being diagnosed with an STI or BBV.
- Preventing the spread of STIs and BBVs is important to keeping individuals and communities safe.

The majority of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) are bacterial or viral infections and are usually passed on during sexual activity. A few STIs are parasitic or fungal.

The types of sexual activity which can transmit infection include vaginal, oral or anal sex. Some STIs (such as herpes or genital warts) can also be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact.

Blood-borne viruses (BBVs) are transmitted from person to person by blood-to-blood contact. This occurs when blood from a person with the virus passes into the bloodstream of another person through a break in the skin or mucous membrane. Some BBVs such as HIV and hepatitis B can also be sexually transmitted (even if blood isn't present).

Types of STIs and BBVs

STIs

Bacteria: Can be cured if treated early.

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhoea
- Syphilis
- Bacterial vaginosis

Viruses: Can be treated but not necessarily cured. The following STIs can be spread from skin-to-skin contact.

- Genital herpes (HSV)
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) - HPV is the virus that causes most cervical and genital cancers. It is vaccine prevenatable and part of the National school vaccine program (for 12-13 year olds).
- Molluscum Contagiosum

Parasites: Can be cured if treated early.

- Pubic lice

Other: Can be cured if treated early.

- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) resulting from an STI

BBVs

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
- Hepatitis B - vaccine preventable and part of National childhood vaccine program.
- Hepatitis C

For more detailed information on BBVs, visit Educator Note: Blood-borne Viruses

Teaching tips

STI and BBV stigma and myths

It is important that stigma associated with STIs and BBVs are reduce and addressed. Stigma is perpetuated by myths and incorrect information.

- It is important to remember STIs and BBV are common - particularly in 15–29-year-olds. Roughly 1-in-3 people will be diagnosed with an STI at one point in their lifetime.
- STIs don't always show symptoms, and if they do symptoms, the symptoms may go away. So people think their body has cleared what is wrong, but the STI is still in their body
- STIs and BBVs are not dirty or unclean - being diagnosed with an STI or BBV is not associated with cleanliness.
- You do not need to have lots of sex to get an STI - only takes one incident.

Focus on functional information

Research shows that information alone is not very effective at changing or modifying health behaviour. Students need more 'functional' than 'factual' knowledge.

For example, it is not as important that students know all about each type of STIs and its symptoms as it is for students to be knowledgeable about:

- condoms - how to use them, where to get them for free, remember to carry them on you, how to negotiate their use
- where to get tested - confidentiality, how to get a Medicare card, how often
- assertive communication skills (functional knowledge) - values, boundaries, help seeking behaviours

The use of 'scare tactic' strategies such as showing explicit and gory photos of STIs is not the most effective way of educating young people.

These images usually illustrate the worst examples of infection and do not represent the average STI symptom. Use of this approach also places undue emphasis on the presence of visible symptoms and is misleading because most people who contract an STI do not experience any symptoms at all.

This strategy also has the potential to cause distress for those students who have already had an STI.

Relevant resources

Websites

Get the Facts, WA Department of Health

Healthysexual, WA Department of Health

Fact sheets/booklets/videos

Sexual health, Healthy WA

Blood borne viruses, Get the Facts

STI/BBV and sexual health animated slide shows, Queensland Health

Everything a teen should know about the HPV vaccine video, Cancer Council

This Background Note relates to the following Learning Activities:

- Ready vs not ready (for sexual activity)
- Sexual consent and the law
- Power to manage relationships
- Blood-borne virus safety
- Sexually transmissible infections

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