From *HIV in Canada: A primer for service providers*

**Sexually Transmitted Infections**

**Key Points**

- Condoms can substantially reduce but not eliminate the risk of STIs.
- STI infections can offer insights into the HIV epidemic.
- The presence of an STI may increase the risk of HIV infection.
- STIs can progress more quickly and be more difficult to treat in people with HIV.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are caused by microorganisms that can be passed from person to person through sexual contact (vaginal, anal or oral sex). The consistent and correct use of condoms can substantially reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of acquiring or transmitting these infections.

Information on STIs is important to HIV in three ways. First, an analysis of STI surveillance data can offer important insights into how quickly and to what extent the HIV epidemic may spread in different populations. Second, the presence of an STI may increase the risk of HIV infection. Third, some STIs can progress more quickly and be more difficult to treat in people who are HIV positive.

Many STIs, can be asymptomatic (i.e., they do not produce symptoms). This makes it more difficult to ensure timely diagnosis. Given that STIs and HIV share routes of transmission, it is essential that people who have been diagnosed with either an STI or HIV be tested for the other infection(s) and provided with appropriate prevention counselling. It is important that co-infected individuals be aware of their status for two reasons: (1) people who know their status usually make behaviour changes that result in a reduced transmission risk for others, and (2) informed decisions about treatment and care cannot be made without this knowledge.

Disclaimer

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV- and hepatitis C-related illness and the treatments in question.

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