

Know your rights and responsibilities: sexual health



We all have rights and responsibilities and want safe, respectful, and healthy relationships. We all have the right to decide when, where, in what situation, and with whom we would like to be sexual. If you think you are ready to start having a sexual relationship with someone, it is important to look after your sexual health and be aware of the consent laws in Australia. It is important to remember any sexual activity without consent is against the law in Australia.

If you are sexually active, it's important you visit a doctor regularly to have sexual health checks and you can ask your doctor about your sexual and reproductive health and rights issues.

SUMMARY

- It is important to be well informed about your sexual health.
- Anyone who is sexually active should have regular sexual health check-ups.
- Practicing safe sex can minimise your risk of a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or unplanned pregnancy.

What is sexual health?

If you are sexually active, it is important to be well informed and ensure you and your partner are safe, healthy and respectful. Sexual health includes physical, emotional and mental wellbeing in relation to sexual matters.



Sexual health is defined by the World Health Organization as 'a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence.'

Source: World Health Organisation

What is a sexual health check?

Getting a sexual health check is simple and is a normal part of a healthy sex life. If you are sexually active, it's important you visit a doctor regularly to have sexual health checks. During a sexual health check, your doctor will ask detailed questions about your sexual history to help determine the support you need. Although you may feel nervous or uncomfortable discussing these topics, doctors are trained to do this and it's important to answer any questions honestly as it could impact on the types of tests or advice you're given. Any discussion you have with your doctor in Australia is strictly confidential.

Sexual health checks might involve:



- discussions about your sexual history and your rights in sexual relationships



- conducting tests (urine, blood, swab tests or visual examinations)



- discussing contraceptive options to prevent sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy



- diagnosing reproductive issues or sexual dysfunction.

Safe sex - minimising risk of STIs and unplanned pregnancy

The best way to reduce your chance of getting an STI or having an unplanned pregnancy is to practice 'safe sex'. Safe sex means taking measures to reduce having contact with your partner's body fluids, and can include using contraception during sexual activity.

Contraception



Contraception works to prevent pregnancy, so people can have sex while preventing an unplanned pregnancy. It's important to discuss contraception with a new partner before you decide to have sex. Contraception affects both you and your partner, so you are both responsible for it. Both you and your partner should consent to any sexual activity. In Australia, if your partner refuses to use contraception, or displays behaviours such as pressure, manipulation or threats around the use of contraception, this is considered a form of sexual abuse.

There are many different forms of contraception. For example, women can consider using a contraceptive implant, emergency contraception pill or oral pill to further reduce the chance of pregnancy; however, they do not protect you from STIs. Some of these contraceptives need a prescription from a doctor or family planning clinic in Australia.

When used correctly, a condom is the only method of contraception that helps to protect against both STIs and pregnancy. They're easily accessible, small and easy to carry. You don't have to see a doctor to get them – you can buy them from the chemist or supermarket or receive them for free at family planning clinics.

It's a good idea to see your doctor or family planning clinic if you're considering your options for contraception. They can advise you on which options might be right for you depending on your health and lifestyle.

STIs



STIs can be passed from one person to another during sexual activities. Some STIs have no symptoms, so you may not know if you or a partner has an STI.

There are many different types of STIs and they can be caused by viruses (e.g., human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), herpes), bacteria (e.g., gonorrhoea, syphilis) or parasites (e.g., pubic lice). Common STI symptoms might include a skin irritation or rash, itching, pain in your lower abdomen or genitals, or a burning sensation going to the toilet.

If there is an infection, it is important that you get treatment and advice on how to stay healthy. While some infections appear to go away without treatment, they stay active in the body. This means infections can be passed on to your sexual partners and/or cause health problems later.

Where do I go for a sexual health check?

You can get checked at your local doctor, sexual health or family planning clinics. Remember, your doctor cannot share the results of your testing with anyone without your permission.

When do I need a sexual health check?

Anyone who is sexually active should have regular sexual health check-ups. If any of the following is relevant to you, a sexual health check is strongly recommended:



- if you think you might have an STI



- if you've had unsafe/unprotected sex



- if a condom broke or fell off during sex



- if you or your partner have more than one sexual partner



- if you're at the start of a new sexual relationship.



Where to get help or talk to someone

If you've been sexually assaulted and you want to make a complaint, you should report it to the police as soon as possible. If you are unsafe or it is an emergency call 000. You can also get support from a sexual assault support service, such as 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732.

Can someone from the PALM scheme help me?

Adjusting to life in another country can be difficult but support and resources are available to help you. If you have questions about adjusting to life in Australia, you can ask your employer. If they don't know the answer, they can tell you who to talk to, including other PALM scheme supports such as:



Country liaison officer (CLO) or labour attachés

You can find all current CLO contact details on the PALM website (<https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/contact>).










PALM scheme support service line on (1800 51 51 31), or email (palm@dewr.gov.au)

Please note the support service line and email inbox are monitored 8:30 am – 6:30 pm AEST - calls after hours should be for critical incidents only.













How can I get more information or confidential professional help?



If you or someone you know wants to find out more information about sexual health and wellbeing while in Australia, you can contact the following information and support services in the table below. These organisations can help you or point you in the right direction to find a service that is relevant to your needs and accessible to you.

KEY REFERRAL AND SUPPORT SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA		
SERVICE	WHAT DOES IT DO?	CONTACT INFORMATION
Reach Out	<p>Reach Out is an online self-help information, peer-support program and referral tools to help people be well and stay well.</p> <p>If you want more information on how to get a sexual health check (like when to get a health check, what happens at a sexual health check and finding a service provider) visit Reach Out website.</p>	<p> Visit their website https://au.reachout.com for more information on: How to get a health check How to talk about sexual health with a partner Culturally diverse sexual health services</p>
Heath Direct	<p>The best way to find a sexual health service provider near you is to visit your doctor or visit the Health Direct website. You can use their service finder to look for help nearest to you – select 'sexual health' under services and enter your postcode to find the service closest to you.</p>	<p> Call: 1800 022 222</p> <p> Web: https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services</p>
Family Planning Alliance Australia (National and State)	<p>Family Planning Alliance is the nation's peak body in reproductive and sexual health. It promotes public health through policy insight and advocacy.</p> <p>If you would like to visit a family planning clinic or ask about education, visit the service page to find the family planning organisation in your area, or contact the association in your state.</p> <p>Visit the Family Planning Alliance Australia website: https://www.familyplanningallianceaustralia.org.au/services/</p>	<p>State and territory family planning associations:</p> <p><u>ACT - Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT</u></p> <p> Phone: 02 6247 3077</p> <p> Web: https://www.shfpact.org.au/</p> <hr/> <p><u>NSW – Family Planning NSW</u></p> <p> Phone: 1300 658 886</p> <p> Web: https://www.fpnsw.org.au/</p> <hr/> <p>(continue to next page)</p>

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<p>Family Planning Alliance Australia (National and State)</p>	<p>Continued from previous page</p> <p>Family Planning Alliance is the nation's peak body in reproductive and sexual health. It promotes public health through policy insight and advocacy.</p> <p>If you would like to visit a family planning clinic or ask about education, visit the service page to find the family planning organisation in your area, or contact the association in your state.</p> <p>Visit the Family Planning Alliance Australia website: https://www.familyplanningallianceaustralia.org.au/services/</p>	<p>State and territory family planning associations:</p> <p><u>NT – Family Planning Welfare Association of NT Inc.</u></p> <p> Phone (08) 8948 0144  Web: http://www.fpwnt.com.au/</p> <hr/> <p><u>QLD - True: Relationships and Reproductive Health</u></p> <p> Phone: (07) 3250 0200  Web: https://www.true.org.au/</p> <hr/> <p><u>SA – Shine SA</u></p> <p> Phone: 1300 883 793  Website: https://shinesa.org.au/</p> <hr/> <p><u>TAS – Family Planning Tasmania</u></p> <p> Phone: (03) 6273 9117  Web: https://fpt.org.au/</p> <hr/> <p><u>VIC – Family Planning Victoria</u></p> <p> Phone: 03 9257 0100  Web: https://shvic.org.au/</p> <hr/> <p><u>WA - Sexual Health Quarters Western Australia</u></p> <p> Phone: (08) 9227 6177  Web: https://shq.org.au/</p>

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