

Sexually transmitted infections

Revision notes · What an STI is, HIV and AIDS, how HIV is transmitted, and how the spread of STIs is controlled.

For Cambridge IGCSE Biology 0610 (and 0970, which has the same content). **Supplement** is Extended content, only examined on Papers 2 and 4.

Sexually transmitted infections Spec 16.6

STIs and HIV Spec 16.6.1, 16.6.2, 16.6.3, 16.6.4, 16.6.5

A **sexually transmitted infection (STI)** is an infection that is transmitted through sexual contact.

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a pathogen that causes an STI. HIV infection may lead to **AIDS** (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). HIV damages the white blood cells of the immune system, so the body finds it harder to fight other infections.

Methods of transmission of HIV

- Sexual contact with an infected person, when body fluids pass from one person to the other.
- Blood-to-blood contact, for example sharing needles used to inject drugs, or infected blood entering a cut.
- From an infected mother to her baby: across the placenta, during birth or in breast milk.

How the spread of STIs is controlled

Methods of controlling the spread of STIs	
Method	How it helps
Using a condom	Acts as a barrier so body fluids cannot pass from one person to another
Not sharing needles	Stops infected blood passing between people
Screening blood used for transfusions	Infected blood is not given to patients
Testing and informing partners	People who are infected can be treated and can avoid passing the infection on
Drug treatment of infected people	Antiretroviral drugs reduce the amount of HIV in the body, which lowers the chance of passing it on, including from mother to baby
Having fewer sexual partners	Reduces the chance of coming into contact with an infected person

Exam tip: A good answer names the method and says how it works: 'use a condom, which prevents body fluids passing between partners'. Do not say that HIV and AIDS are the same thing: HIV is the virus, AIDS is the condition it may lead to.

Quick check

- 1 . What is a sexually transmitted infection?
- 2 . What may HIV infection lead to?
- 3 . Give two ways in which HIV can be transmitted.
- 4 . How does a condom reduce the spread of STIs?

Quick check answers

Sexually transmitted infections

1. An infection that is transmitted through sexual contact.
2. AIDS.
3. Any two from: sexual contact, sharing needles or contact with infected blood, from an infected mother to her baby.
4. It is a barrier that stops body fluids passing between partners.