

## Get tested

The Genitourinary (GU) Clinic is located on the second floor of the outpatient department in Mater Dei Hospital. It offers counselling, testing, diagnosis and treatment for STIs and sexual health related issues.

The clinic operates with absolute confidentiality, with every patient being given a unique code upon appointment for testing. Prescriptions for PrEP can also be obtained from the GU Clinic following a few routine tests. The clinic is very professional in its operation and is often applauded for being LGBTIQ friendly.

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## Some facts:

Men who have sex with men (MSM) represent the majority of new cases of HIV in Malta.



When used correctly and consistently, condoms have 90% to 95% success rate of preventing HIV.

Malta has around 1 in 1000 of its population (aged 15-49) living with HIV/AIDS.



The most common STIs reported by the GU clinic are HPV, Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis and HIV.

Many STIs are asymptomatic, therefore getting tested on a regular basis and wearing a condom for penetrative sex is important.



**U=U**

Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U). When a person is living with HIV but is under effective treatment, the level of HIV (viral load) in the blood is substantially lower. This allows the person to have a healthy sexual life.

**Human Rights Directorate**  
A3 Towers, Level 0,  
Triq l-Arkata  
Paola PLA1211

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Co-funded by the Rights, Equality  
and Citizenship (REC) Programme  
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# CHECK IT OUT

## Sexual Health in LGBTIQ Communities

The World Health Organisation defines sexual health as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being 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. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” (WHO, 2006)

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are caused by viruses, bacteria and parasites which have been identified to be transmitted through sexual contact. Several cases of STIs go unnoticed as some people do not seek testing out of fear, shame or lack of symptoms.

Good sexual health depends on regular check-ups and protected sex. People can still have healthy, happy sex lives and good sexual health even while living with STIs for which there is yet no cure such as HIV or Hepatitis B, if they are diagnosed and treated on time.



## Oral Sex

Oral sex is the stimulation of the penis or the vagina using the mouth, lips or tongue. There is a greater risk of acquiring infection when giving rather than receiving, which can be diminished by using a condom or dental dam.

One should avoid swallowing or having semen or vaginal fluids in their mouth. It is also advised not to wash one's teeth before oral sex, as this may leave microscopic cuts in the mouth, which makes it more vulnerable to STIs. Chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis are more commonly transmitted through oral sex, while HIV infection is very rare in such cases.

Anal sex refers to the penetration of the anus using a penis, fingers or sex toys. Anal sex is often associated with MSM but it is also practiced by heterosexual men and women. Unprotected anal sex is considered as a high-risk behaviour for contracting STIs, especially for the receiver. Using a condom and water-based lube can greatly reduce the risks involved. You should change the condom if having sex for more than half an hour to avoid it breaking.

The lining of the rectum is a thin membrane that can easily be torn or damaged during sex, making it more vulnerable to infections. Although fissures do not cause long-term damage to the rectum, they heal very slowly and may increase the risk of infections entering the bloodstream.

If anal sex is followed by vaginal or oral sex, it is very important to change the condom being used. This reduces the chances of transferring bacteria found in the rectum to the vagina or mouth. You should use a different condom with each partner.

If you are a trans man who has recently had lower surgery and have unhealed skin, this could make it easier for you to acquire or pass on HIV, as bleeding can provide a route into or out of your body.

## Vaginal Sex

Vaginal sex is the penetration of the vagina by an object which can be a penis, fingers or sex toys. It is very important that when using sex toys, a different condom is used for each partner. Sex toys should be well taken care of and cleaned regularly with soap and water. Sex toys are not to be shared with others.

If you are a trans woman who has had lower surgery, the risk of contracting an STI may vary depending on the technique used for the genital reconstruction. The use of water-based lube helps prevent tearing and makes having sex more comfortable. Always use a condom after vaginal dilation.

Transmen who still have a cervix will still need to do a regular cervical smear test and mammogram unless they have done a mastectomy.

Rimming is the practise, where one person's mouth and tongue explores the anus of another. It is very important for one to wash the body before and after rimming, while also getting vaccinated for Hepatitis A and B.

Rimming may increase the risk of acquiring enterobacteria such as shigella, salmonella and coli which may cause enteritis and enterocolitis.

Rimming should not take place if someone has ulcers or cuts in the mouth or has brushed teeth right before. Using dental dams can reduce the amount of contact between bacteria in the anus and the mouth.

## Preventative Treatment

In addition to condoms, which provide cheap and effective protection against STIs, one can consider preventative treatment such as PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) which reduces the risk of transmission of HIV by more than 99% when taken correctly.

PrEP is a pill that is available in local pharmacies on presentation of a prescription from the GU Clinic or an infectious disease specialist. It is recommended that the use and frequency of PrEP is discussed with the prescriber.

PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxes) is a short course of medicine which is used shortly after possible exposure to HIV, to prevent from taking hold in one's body. Those at high risk of exposure to HIV, are recommended to use PrEP and PEP used only as a last resort.

Since PrEP and PEP only prevents HIV, condoms should be used to prevent other STIs such as Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea and Syphilis, which could also impact quality of life.

