

During your time at university, it is an important time for you to choose your own lifestyle, determine your own choices, and take responsibility for your own actions. At the same time, your actions will affect you and your future health, so it's also a time to consider your health and future seriously. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are able to infect anyone, and if left untreated, they can have serious consequences for your future health, including reproductive health such as pregnancy and childbirth. Accurate knowledge about STIs can help protect yourself and your loved ones. Traditionally, the term “sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)” has been used for infectious diseases caused by sexual transmission. However, in many sexually transmitted infectious diseases, the infection can be spread in not only the progressed phases where the typical symptoms have appeared, but also in the early phases where the typical symptoms will not appear; so now the abbreviation of STIs is used to refer to sexually transmitted infectious disease, rather than STDs.

STIs are transmitted from person to person primarily through sexual contact or sexually simulating contact, such as through the mucous membranes or skin of the genitals, mouth, or anus. STI pathogens vary, including bacteria, viruses, fungi, protozoa, and parasites, and STIs have the potential to be infected with multiple pathogens and at same time. STIs can occur in anyone regardless of sexuality or age. Major STIs include syphilis, genital chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital herpes virus infection, condyloma acuminatum, vaginal trichomoniasis, pubic lice, genital candidiasis, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV infection/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Among these, an increase in the incidence of syphilis has been reported in recent years.

Characteristics of STIs, including the incubation period, symptoms, testing, diagnosis, and treatments vary depending on the pathogen. If you would like to know more detailed information on various STIs, please refer to the specialized websites (see below) such as the National Institute for Health Risk Management's infectious disease information site (external site).

General clinical examinations for STIs can be done by visiting a medical institution (urology, gynecology, dermatology, etc.) for a consultation and testing. The clinical tests vary depending on the symptoms and the infectious disease, but may include blood tests, visual examinations, urine tests, and vaginal discharge samples. If you think you may have been infected with an STI or are worried about it, please consult a doctor as soon as possible, because STIs often have no symptoms. Depending on the pathogen, there may be an incubation period during which a test result may not appear as positive, and even if the result is negative, you may be advised to take a retest after a certain period. Public Health Centers also offer anonymous and free testing for STIs such as syphilis and HIV, and some Public Health Centers may also offer testing for genital chlamydia and gonorrhea infection at the same time.

Treatment for STIs varies depending on the pathogens, and most STIs are treatable. It is important to follow your doctor's instructions and continue appropriate treatment for the appropriate period. In particular, if the appropriate treatment is not completed in the early stages, complications and after-effects might occur, so early detection and completion of treatment are extremely important. In addition, please discuss STIs thoroughly with your partner, and make sure your partner also gets tested. You and your partner should be treated at the same time to avoid "ping-pong infections" between you and your partner, in case your partner is infected and untreated.

Preventive measures to protect yourself from STIs include using condoms properly, and getting tested regularly

and early. Sex without using condoms and sex with multiple partners are considered to be particularly risky for STIs. Please note that while condoms are a very effective way to prevent STIs, they are not 100% effective. Some STIs can be prevented by using condoms properly (such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV), but others which are transmitted through areas that cannot be covered by condoms cannot be completely prevented (such as syphilis, genital herpes, and condyloma acuminatum, which are transmitted through direct contact).

Additionally, on World AIDS Day, December 1st (established by the WHO), AIDS awareness activities (Red Ribbon) are held around the world with the aim of preventing the spread of AIDS on a global scale and eliminating discrimination and prejudice against patients and those infected. In Tokyo, awareness-raising activities will also be carried out from November 16th to December 15th as part of AIDS Prevention Month, so please take this opportunity to check it out.

If you have any questions, please consult the Health Care Center, TUFs.

References:

#1 STI: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (in Japanese)

https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/kenkou_iryuu/kenkou/kekaku-kansenshou/seikansenshou/index.html

#2 STI: The Infectious Disease Information Website: Japan Institute for Health Security (in Japanese)

<https://id-info.jihs.go.jp/diseases/route/std/index.html>

#3 STI: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/sti/index.html>

#4 World AIDS Day

<https://worldaidsday.org/>

#5 Tokyo AIDS Prevention Month

https://www.hokeniryo.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/kansen/info/aids/aids/yobo_gekkan/whats_yobo_gekkan