

## Healthy Sexual Relationships

A healthy relationship is one that makes you and your partner feel good about yourselves and about each other. It is a relationship based on respect for one another. In Canada, both partners in a relationship are equal. They make decisions together, including decisions about sex. Both partners must agree to have sex. It is illegal for one person to force the other to have sex even if the couple is married. Good communication is the key to an enjoyable and healthy relationship.

### Protect Yourself and Your Partner from STIs

Whether you are married or single, it is important to keep yourself and your sexual partner (or partners) safe from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The best way to avoid STIs is to follow these rules:

- Abstain from casual sex. Don't have sex until you are married or you have met your life partner. Having sex with many partners increases your chance of getting and passing on STIs.
- Be faithful to your life partner. If you have sex with others, you may expose yourself to STIs and pass on the infection to your partner and even your children.
- Use a condom every time you have any kind of sexual contact.
- If you are taking medicine to treat an STI, don't have sex until you finish your drugs.

### How Do You Get STIs?

Anyone can be infected with STIs. You can get STIs through non-sexual contact with blood and body fluids, but people usually get STIs from sexual contact. In Canada it is perfectly fine to ask your partner to use a condom.

### STIs in Canada

STIs are common in Canada. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a serious kind of STI that causes AIDS, and there is no cure for AIDS. Researchers tell us that about 58,000 people have HIV in Canada today, and many of them don't even know it. A person may not know they have HIV if they don't have any symptoms. Because you don't know if someone has HIV, it is important to protect yourself so you don't become infected.

### Responsibility to Inform Sexual Partners of HIV

This is the law. If you have HIV and your partner is at risk of becoming infected, you must tell your partner BEFORE you have sex or any other activity that could transmit HIV. If you use a condom, you do not have to tell your partner that you have HIV, but it is a good idea.

### Consequences of Not Informing Your Partner

It is a criminal offence to expose another person to HIV through unprotected sex. If you know you have HIV and you are not using condoms, and you do not tell your partner that you have HIV, you can be convicted of a serious criminal offence and be sentenced to many years in prison.

### Getting Tested for STIs

You can be tested for STIs at clinics and hospitals in Manitoba. Testing is free, and they will not share the results of your tests with anyone except you. There are two clinics in Manitoba where you do not need to tell them your name when you go for testing:

- Nine Circles Community Health Centre, 705 Broadway, Winnipeg (204) 940-6000
- Public Health Services, Unit A, 800 Rosser Avenue, Brandon (204) 571-8483

You should get tested for HIV and STIs if:

- You have any concerns about your or your partner's sexual health
- You or your partner have sexual contact with other people
- The condom breaks or you have sex without a condom
- You were raped or forced to have sex
- You have contact with someone's blood or body fluids (for example if you accidentally touch a used needle)

If the results of your tests are positive for HIV, you must tell all of your previous sexual partners. Even if the results are negative, you should go for another test after a few months. HIV may not show up in tests in the early stages of the virus.