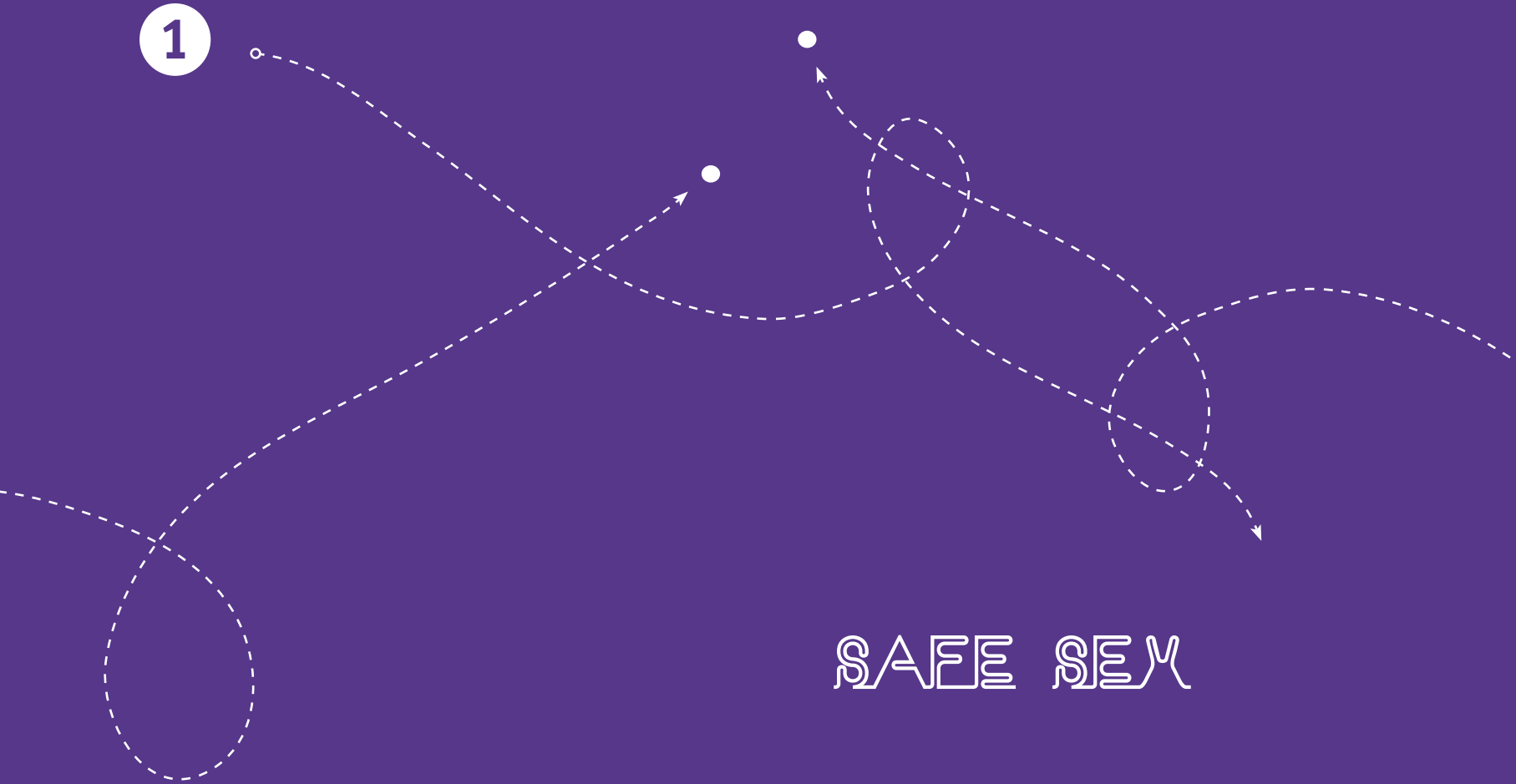


This booklet is about **safe sex** and sex work. The information it gives is useful for both women and men who have just become sex workers and for those who have been working as a sex worker for a while. It tells you all about the best ways to protect yourself and others against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and what you should do if you think you have an STI. You will also find information about each infection, STI testing, contraceptives and various things you can do to stay healthy.

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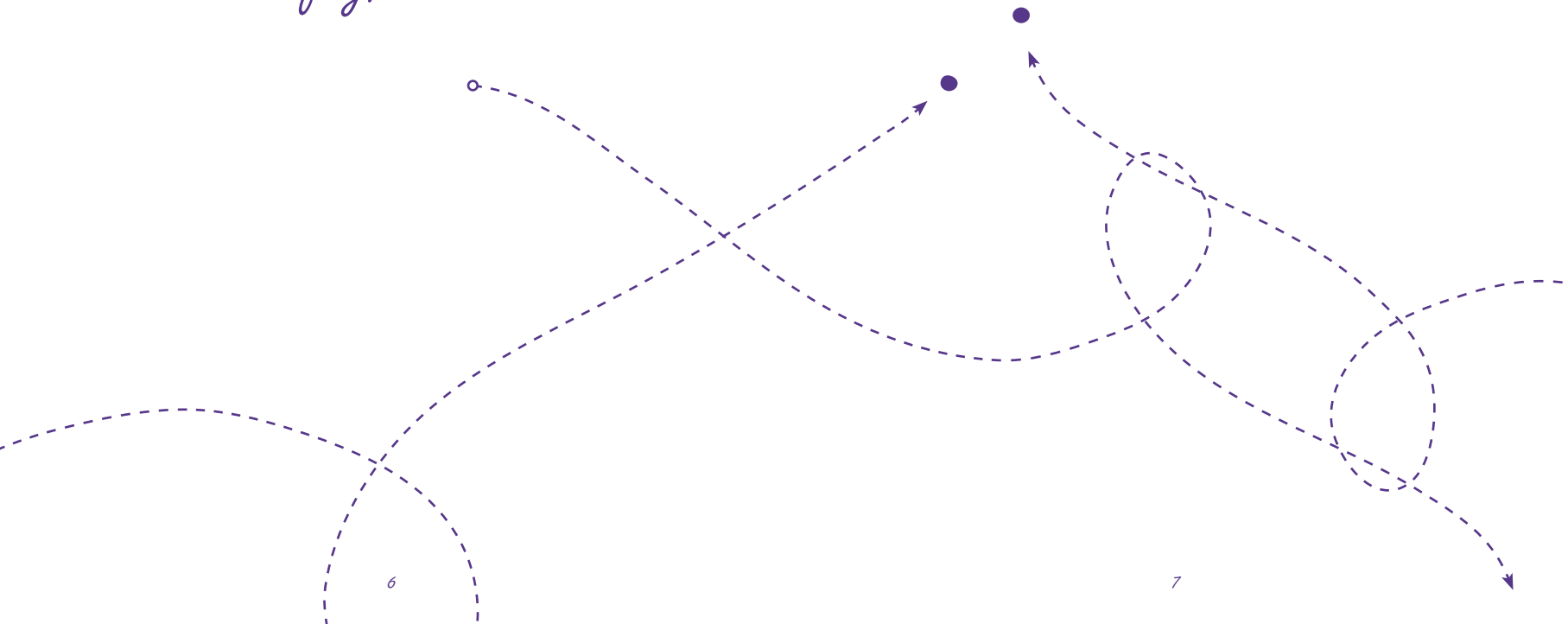
1



SAFE SEX

*If you work as a sex worker,
you won't have to catch a sexually
transmitted infection (STI).*

*That's why it is important to know
how to work safely.*



What is safe sex?

Safe sex means that you protect yourself and others against sexually transmitted infections. You can catch an STI by having unprotected contact between the vagina, penis, mouth or anus. Also if there is contact between body fluids such as blood, vaginal fluid, semen or pre-seminal fluid (pre-cum). If you always have safe sex, there's hardly any risk of catching an STI. During your work, clients will want to do all kind of different things. Decide for yourself what you will and what you will not do. Here's some advice about working safely during different sexual techniques.

Safe sex for different sexual techniques

Vaginal sex (vaginal intercourse, fucking): use a condom and extra water-based lubricant.

Blow jobs (oral sex, sucking cock, giving head): use a condom.

Oral sex on vagina (licking, cunnilingus): use a dental dam, a piece of very thin rubber. Instead of a dental dam you could use a condom cut open or a piece of Saran Wrap. **Anal sex** (anal intercourse, anal fucking): use a condom and extra water-based lubricant. **Hand jobs** (jacking/jerking off): a condom isn't necessary. If you have any cuts on your hands, cover them with plasters.

Finger-fucking : a condom isn't necessary. **Anal finger-fucking** : wear a thin latex glove or put a condom on your finger and use lubricant. **Kissing** (deep kissing, French kissing): don't kiss if you or your client have any blisters, sores or scabs on or around your mouth. Herpes is a virus that is easy to catch by kissing. **Body-to-body massage** : a condom isn't necessary. Make sure that no semen gets into your mouth or vagina.

Threesomes or group sex : every time you change partners, use a new condom and extra lubricant.

Different techniques in succession : from anal sex to vaginal sex, use a new condom and more lubricant. That way you'll stop any bacteria getting from the anus into the vagina.

Oral sex and condoms

Most people know that vaginal or anal sex without a condom isn't safe. But what many people don't know, is that you can also get an STI in your mouth or throat from unsafe oral sex. Sex workers regularly do blow jobs, and doctors often diagnose them with STIs in their throat, for example gonorrhoea or chlamydia. Therefore the advice is to use a condom for oral sex.

tip

The organizations Gh@pro – Pasop – Espace P can give you more information about safe sex.
© see the addresses at the back.

2

CONDOMS AND
LUBRICANT

To keep sex safe, you need to know all about condoms and lubricant (lube). Not all condoms are suitable for safe sex and there are different kinds of lubricants too.

In this chapter you'll find the most important information about condoms and lubricant.

Condoms

A condom is a thin sheath that is unrolled down an erect penis. It protects you against pregnancy and against STIs.

Which are the best condoms?

There are all kinds of condoms on the market. But not all condoms are of good quality. Watch out for these things when you buy and use condoms: All approved condoms have a **CE-code**. This code warrants that condom and packaging comply with the European standard. Condoms from countries outside the European Union do not have this quality mark. **The expiry date on the pack**. After that date, there is no guarantee that the condom will be reliable and it shouldn't be used. **The pack itself**. If the pack is damaged, the condom is no longer reliable and you shouldn't use it. If you work at a sex club or brothel, use the condoms they have available, but check them first for the 3 things mentioned above. The best condoms to use are also the ones you find easy and comfortable to work with. Decide for yourself which condoms you prefer. Just make sure they are of good quality.

What kind of condoms are there?

Condoms are available in different materials and in various shapes and sizes. There are condoms made of latex (rubber) or polyurethane (synthetic), wider or closer fitting condoms, ones with or without a special tip to catch the semen. They're ribbed or smooth and they may or may not be lubricated.

Latex condoms

Latex condoms are the most widely used. They are available in different sizes, thicknesses and colours. Examples are Glyder Ambassador, Benelux or London. Latex condoms with a CE-code are suitable for vaginal and anal sex. There are special flavoured condoms on sale for oral sex. If they have a CE-code, they can also be used for vaginal and anal sex.

Polyurethane condoms

Polyurethane is a synthetic material. That's why these condoms are suitable for people who are allergic to rubber. So if you, your client or your partner have a rubber allergy, these are the condoms to use. Ezon and Avanti from Durex are made of polyurethane.

The female condom

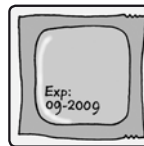
The female condom (Femidom) is also made of polyurethane. It is inserted into the vagina. Use one if a client has a problem with using ordinary condoms, has an allergy for rubber or cannot get a good erection.

Where should you keep condoms?

Condoms should be kept somewhere where the pack can't get damaged. Keep them so that they can't come into contact with sharp objects such as a nail file. If the pack does get damaged, the condom is not safe to use.

Using condoms properly

Here are the rules for getting condom use right. Avoid any contact between penis, vagina, mouth or anus before putting on the condom.



Check the date on the pack and carefully check the pack for any damage. Don't use condoms that are past their expiry date or from a pack that is damaged. Throw them away and use new ones.



Carefully tear open the pack. Make sure you don't damage the condom with sharp fingernails when you take it out or put it on.



Hold the closed end of the condom tight between your thumb and forefinger. Don't let any air get trapped in its tip. There should be enough space in the tip (1-2 cm) for the semen.



Only put on the condom if the penis is completely erect. Do not pull the condom over the penis, but unroll it as far as possible. Put some lubricant on the condom.



Make sure the client **withdraws immediately after ejaculation (coming).** **Hold the edge of the condom** as he does so that the condom stays on. The penis may soften quickly after ejaculation and the condom could easily slip off.



Slide the condom off carefully, tie a knot in it and **throw it in the bin.**

Condom failure

Sometimes a condom will break, split or slip off. If you have these problems regularly, try and find out why. Then you can prevent this from happening in the future.

Here are some possible causes of condom failure:

- You don't use enough (or any) lubricant.
- You use a lubricant that isn't suitable and contains grease or oil.
- Something goes wrong when you put the condom on: you damage it with sharp nails, air gets trapped in the tip of the condom, or the condom isn't unrolled far enough.
- The condom has dried out during a long fucking session and you haven't added any extra lubricant. Use a new condom if sex takes longer than 15 minutes.
- You use poor quality condoms.
- The condom is past its expiry date.
- The condom was not kept in a safe place, so the pack has got damaged. Just a small hole in the pack is enough to make the condom unusable.
- You're using a vaginal cream, like Canesten or gyno-daktarin. Most vaginal creams are greasy.

What to do after condom failure?

If the client came in you, you must remove the sperm. You must do this carefully so that you don't cause any wounds. Wounds are like small entrance gates through which germs can easily enter your body. **In case of vaginal sex** : let the sperm flow out of your vagina by sitting on your heels and pressing gently. Never use your fingers or an object, this may cause small wounds. **In case of anal sex** : you must try to squeeze out the sperm. Don't use an anal douche. The mucous membrane in the intestinal tract is very fragile. External washing is of course not a problem. **In case of oral sex** : you must spit out the sperm. You can softly rinse your mouth with water. Be careful not to swallow or gargle. The mucous membrane of the throat is very thin and easily lets through germs.

What NOT to do when a condom fails?

In case of vaginal sex : don't rinse your vagina with a strong jet of water. This would cause germs and sperm to go deeper into your vagina. Don't use any disinfecting vaginal creams or solvents. They may damage the mucous membrane in your vagina and may cause you to get a sexually transmitted infection. You can't wash away bacteria and viruses! **In case of anal sex** : don't use an anal douche. When you insert an object into the anus, you can easily cause wounds, with a risk of infection. **In case of oral sex** : don't rinse with mouth water or other products. It is best not to brush or floss your teeth, this might cause small wounds. Wait at least one hour to eat or drink.

Condom failure and preventing STIs and HIV

If a condom has slipped off or broken, the advice is to have yourself tested for STIs. For most STIs, the diagnosis takes one or 2 weeks. It is no use going for a test earlier – unless of course you have any symptoms. You may have reason to be worried about hiv after condom failure. Perhaps semen from a client or partner who is hiv positive got into your body. In that case, you should immediately get in touch with a hospital accident and emergency department (see the addresses in the back ARC). You might qualify for treatment with PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis). PEP is only given if there is an obvious risk of infection, not after each broken condom or unsafe contact. In order to reduce the risk of infection, you must start to take PEP as soon as possible (2 to 72 hours after the unprotected contact).

PEP does not give a 100% guarantee that hiv infection will be prevented.

Condom failure and contraception

If you are not using another contraceptive, condom failure could lead to pregnancy. To avoid becoming pregnant, you can take emergency contraception – a ‘morning-after’ pill. The morning-after pill is available at pharmacies. Do it as soon as possible: within 72 hours at the latest.

Lubricant (lube)

There are lubricants that are specially made for sex. Most condoms already have some lubricant on them. Some stronger condoms are not lubricated but come with lube supplied separately. You can buy lubricant in bottles, tubes or single use packets.

Why do you need lubricant?

A dry vagina makes fucking painful and makes it easier for a condom to break. If you use lubricant, there is much less risk of a condom breaking. You should always use lots of lubricant for anal sex, because the anus itself doesn’t produce any fluid. The lubricant that may already be on the condom is never enough for anal sex. Without extra lubricant, anal sex is painful and there is a greater risk of the condom bursting.

How do you use lubricant?

For vaginal sex, put lubricant onto the condom, after rolling the condom on to the penis. If your vagina is very dry, you may want to put some lubricant in your vagina too. For anal sex, put a lot of lubricant on the condom and into your anus.

Which are the best lubricants?

Always use a water-based lubricant for sex with a latex condom. It contains no grease or oil. Latex dissolves in grease and oil, causing the condom to burst. The best lubricants to use are: Durex Bene-Luxe Jelly, Top Gel from Durex, Sensilube, Wet Stuff, Lubrilan or K-Y Jelly. You can also buy Eros, which are silicone-based lubricants. These are suitable for erotic massage while containing no substances that can damage condoms.

What should you not use as a lubricant?

Do not use anything that contains grease or oil, such as vaseline, baby oil or massage oil. Also avoid anything that contains perfume. Perfumed products can damage the mucous membrane (the 'lining') of your vagina or anus, increasing the risk of catching an STI.

NEVER USE A LUBRICANT THAT CONTAINS NONOXYNOL-9.

Nonoxynol-9 damages the tissue of the vagina or anus, making you more susceptible to STIs.

If you have used anything greasy or oily for a massage, make sure you wash yourself and your client well with soap and water before having sex.

tip

For more information about condoms and lubricants:
www.condomerie.com, www.condomobiel.be and
www.allesoverseks.be



3

STIs: SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

You can catch an STI (sexually transmitted infection) from unsafe sex.

This chapter gives information about STIs in general and about the most common ones.

For each infection, we give a short description of the symptoms and treatment plus practical advice about working safely.

How do you get infected with an STI?

If you have unsafe sex with someone who has an STI, you can also become infected. STI organisms live in the mucous membrane (the ‘lining’) of the vagina, penis, mouth, throat or anus. They also live in body fluids such as vaginal fluid, pre-seminal fluid (pre-cum), semen and blood. That means that there doesn’t need to be full penetration for infection to occur; rubbing against each other may also cause infection. So make sure you always use a condom in time. Some STIs can damage the mucous membrane, making it easier for other STIs – such as hepatitis B and hiv – to enter your bloodstream. That’s why there is a greater risk of becoming infected with other STIs if you already have an infection. There are also STIs that are transmitted via parasites. You can become infected with these without even having sex. Skin-to-skin contact is often enough.

How do you know that you’ve caught an STI?

Both men and women can have an STI without knowing it. Often there are no symptoms. When there are symptoms, these are mostly:

- Discharge or pus from the vagina, penis or anus. Women may have more discharge than usual. The discharge could be watery, milky, yellowish or greenish, or smell unusual.
- A burning feeling, irritation or pain during or after passing urine, or regularly having to pass small amounts of urine.
- Sores, warts, blisters on the vagina, mouth, penis or anus.
- Itching in the pubic hair or on the vulva, tip of the penis or anus.
- Swollen glands in the groin.
- Pain in the abdomen.

- Bleeding during or after sex.
- Pain in or around one or both testicles.

Can all STIs be treated?

Bacterial STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis can be completely cured – as long as you have the right treatment in time. Viral STIs such as hiv, herpes cannot be cured with medication. But there is medication that can treat the symptoms and slow the virus' progress. A hepatitis B infection can develop in different ways; you can read more about that in the section on this illness.

Can you work when you have an STI?

If you have an STI, it is best to have no sexual contact during the treatment. A temporary rest from working is important. That way your body can recover. As you will not earn any money when you don't work, it is probably not possible for you to stop work completely. That's why we give specific advice for each STI on how to work safely.

tip

Wash your client. This gives you the opportunity to check him for symptoms of an STI. Look for any blisters, cuts, warts or discharge. If you see anything like that, it's best to refuse him. Especially if the symptoms can't be covered by a condom.

Different STIs

In this booklet we describe the STIs that are most common in Belgium. STIs can be divided into infections caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites. We also mention other infections, such as bacterial vaginosis and thrush. These are no STIs, but infections that are often seen among people with many changing sexual contacts. For each STI or other infection we give information about the symptoms and treatment plus some practical advice.

STIs caused by BACTERIA

Chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis are caused by bacteria. These STIs can be cured completely if treated in time. STIs can occur in different parts of your body. If you have given a blow job without using a condom, you could get an infection in your throat. Unsafe vaginal fucking can lead to an infection in your vagina. STIs that are caused by bacteria are treated with antibiotics.

CHLAMYDIA

Chlamydia is very common in Belgium. It is an STI that is transmitted easily. You could become infected in your vagina, your anus or your throat and men can have it in the urethra (urine tube in the penis). Chlamydia is easy to treat, but if you don't do something about it quickly, you can become infertile as a woman.

Symptoms : most women don't notice anything, because there are no obvious symptoms. Sometimes there's slightly more discharge than usual or you'll bleed

more during your period. If you do have symptoms, then it's most likely to be bleeding during and shortly after sex, abdominal pain or a fever. With an anal infection there could be symptoms like itching, irritation or a slimy discharge. Men often have more symptoms than women, such as watery discharge from the penis or pain when passing urine. But also men can have no symptoms at all.

Treatment : a course of antibiotics.

Practical advice : if you have a vaginal or anal chlamydia infection, the advice is not to have vaginal or anal sex during the week after treatment, not even sex with a condom. Your mucous membrane will get the chance to rest and heal. It is safe to give blow jobs and hand jobs. But if the infection is in your throat, you shouldn't have oral sex until it has been treated. After the infection has cleared you can start working normally again.

GONORRHOEA (THE CLAP)

Gonorrhoea is similar to chlamydia. If left untreated, it can lead to infertility in women, but fortunately gonorrhoea is easy to treat. A gonorrhoea infection can occur in the throat, vagina or anus, or a man's urethra.

Symptoms : most women have no symptoms of gonorrhoea. Sometimes you may have greenish or yellowish discharge that smells unpleasant, pain when passing urine, or abdominal pain. Men usually do have symptoms: a greenish discharge from the penis or pain when passing urine. The minority only has vague symptoms or none at all.

Treatment : a course of antibiotics.

Practical advice : the same advice as for chlamydia.

SYPHILIS (THE POX)

Syphilis is less common. But it is an STI to watch out for, because if the infection is not treated in time there can be serious complications. The first symptoms can occur on the inside of the mouth, vagina, penis or anus, or on the skin around the penis or vulva. After a while syphilis can spread through the bloodstream to other parts of the body. It is easy to treat if treatment is started in time.

Symptoms : **Stage I**: After infection, it can take between a few weeks and 3 months for the symptoms to appear. Sometimes, these symptoms are not very clear but at or around the place of infection, you will notice one or more sores. They are small, hard and most of the time they don't hurt. Sometimes, they are in the vagina or in the anus where you can't see them.

The sores go away by themselves even if you don't treat them. But without any treatment the bacteria remains in your body and you can infect others.

Stage II: In the second stage of syphilis you may have flu-like symptoms, hair loss or pink/red spots on your skin. This will also go away by itself. But just as in the first stage, untreated syphilis means you could still pass on the infection.

Stage III: Up to more than ten years after becoming infected, various organs in your body could become damaged and you may develop serious illnesses.

Treatment : you will be treated with antibiotics. After your treatment, you are cured. Although you can no longer infect others, your blood will always show that you have had a syphilis infection.

Practical advice : syphilis is a very infectious STI. The bacteria are easily

passed on. So our advice is: no oral, vaginal or anal sex during the first ten days after treatment starts. Hand jobs are safe. After you've been treated you can continue working.

STIs caused by VIRUSES

There is no medication to treat STIs that are caused by viruses, such as hepatitis B, herpes, genital warts, and hiv and aids. But there is medication that can control the various viruses in order to relieve the symptoms.

HEPATITIS B

Hepatitis B can cause serious health problems such as an inflammation of the liver. The virus is found in blood, semen and vaginal fluid and is easily passed on.

Symptoms : ① **Acute**: 2 to 6 months after infection symptoms can occur.

Only one in 3 persons actually have symptoms. These can be: flu-like symptoms, lack of energy, tiredness, nausea, abdominal pain, dark urine and light stools, joint pains and yellow colouring of the eyes and skin. The symptoms may last for a couple of weeks or even several months. When all the other symptoms have gone, you could suffer from tiredness for a few more months.

② **Chronic**: In 5 to 10% the virus does not leave the body and stays lifelong. You are a 'carrier' and can infect other people. For a small percentage of the 'carriers' the liver will stay infected and the infection becomes chronic. In the long run the liver can be damaged severely, with chances of liver cancer.

Treatment : in the acute form there is generally no treatment. You have to rest and stick to a diet. For the chronic form of hepatitis B there is medication that prevents you from getting any serious illnesses later on in life. You must go for treatment to a specialist doctor. If you take other medication or the contraceptive pill, tell your doctor. This is because most drugs are broken down by your liver, and an inflamed liver could cause problems.

Practical advice : if you have an acute hepatitis B infection you can be too ill to work. Do not have oral, vaginal or anal sex, not even with a condom, until your doctor has declared you fit again. If you are a carrier, the advice is always to use condoms for oral, anal or vaginal sex to prevent any mucous membrane contact between you and your partner. A carrier's partner can be vaccinated against hepatitis B. Hepatitis B is very contagious. You may consider stopping with sex work.

Protection against hepatitis B?

Get a vaccination against hepatitis B – it's free and confidential. Vaccination is the only way to have complete protection against hepatitis B.

After 3 vaccinations you are protected. The vaccine is perfectly safe. It rarely causes side effects, and if it does, these are usually very slight. Your muscles may ache a little after you have been vaccinated but that is all. You can get a free vaccination at the organizations Gh@pro, Pasop and Espace P.

GENITAL HERPES

Genital herpes causes a rash and blisters that turn into small sores that gradually dry up, leaving scabs. These symptoms can occur in or around the vagina, penis or anus. Cold sores around the mouth are also a form of herpes, but they are caused by another type of herpes virus. What is most infectious is the fluid inside the blisters and sores. The virus is easily passed on during unsafe vaginal or anal fucking and oral sex, but also by kissing. Cold sores around the mouth can be transmitted to the genitals or the other way around. Infection can even occur without any symptoms.

Symptoms : women and men can have itching, a burning or painful feeling, a rash or blisters in, on or around the genitals. Glands in the groin may also swell up and be painful. Sometimes there is extra discharge or pain when passing urine. The symptoms disappear by themselves but the virus remains in the roots of the nerves in your body. That means that the symptoms will recur, particularly when your resistance is low – when you're tired or stressed, or when you have your period. The first time you have a herpes outbreak will probably be the worst, often with a fever, headache or aching muscles. After that, herpes attacks can be milder.

Treatment : there is no cure for herpes. There is medication that can make an attack less painful and shorter.

Practical advice : the herpes virus can easily be passed on during an attack because blisters and sores are not always covered by a condom. That's why it's safer not to have sex during an attack of herpes. And don't let your partner or client lick you or kiss you if they have a cold sore. Also, don't give blow jobs or kiss you if you have a cold sore yourself. A hand job is no problem.

GENITAL WARTS

This STI is also caused by a virus. The warts occur in, on or around the genitals. The virus is also on the mucous membrane. A blow job may lead to warts in the mouth and anal sex could leave you with warts in your anus or on your buttocks. You can even get genital warts by using a towel or facecloth belonging to someone who has warts.

Symptoms : it mostly starts with some small warts that then get bigger and start to spread. You can't always see them because they may be deep in the vagina or anus. Often there are no symptoms, but the warts may start to itch and become painful during sex. They don't usually go away by themselves.

Treatment : get treated as soon as possible, even if you only have one wart. There are different treatment methods: dabbing with special liquid, freezing, laser treatment, burning or surgically removing them. After treatment the warts may recur. The treatment can then be repeated. If you have a lot of warts, or if they are internal, the treatment has to be carried out by a specialist. This is often a dermatologist or a gynaecologist.

Practical advice : genital warts can occur at places that are not covered by the condom. In that case no oral, vaginal or anal sex.

HIV

Hiv is the virus that causes aids. That's why it is often called the aids virus. Hiv can be transmitted during unsafe sex and by blood-blood contact, e.g. by sharing needles and/or syringes. You can't see whether someone is infected with hiv. A blood test has to be done to find out whether someone has it. After infection with hiv, it takes 3 months before the antibodies against hiv can definitely be determined in your blood. So if you have had unsafe sex and want to know if you have become infected, you have to wait 3 months before having an hiv test. If the test shows antibodies in your blood, then you are hiv positive.

Symptoms : An infection can take 2 different courses.

❶ **You are hiv positive but are not aware of it:** If you are hiv positive, it doesn't necessarily mean that you will have any symptoms. At the beginning you probably won't even notice that you're infected. You may stay healthy for years. But you can infect others. As the amount of virus in your body increases, it damages your immune system and you will notice symptoms. That may happen after 2 years, but it may take more than ten years. Severe tiredness, night sweats, extreme weight loss for no apparent reason, fever, chronic diarrhoea and shortness of breath can point to an advanced hiv infection. The diagnosis 'aids' is only given when the hiv virus has damaged your immune system so much that you become ill from an infection that wouldn't be a problem for a healthy immune system.

❷ **You've had an hiv test and know that you are hiv positive:** If you have discovered that you have been infected with hiv, the infection will take a

different course. You will be referred to an hiv treatment centre (ARC) and regular blood tests will be done to keep an eye on how the infection develops. If necessary, treatment is started to prevent any of the symptoms mentioned above.

Treatment : anti-hiv medication can inhibit the virus multiplying in the body, so that your immune system remains intact. That's why these drugs are called 'hiv inhibitors'. Hiv infection cannot be cured but it is easier to treat. With the new generation of hiv inhibitors, people with hiv can lead normal lives. But they will have to take tablets every day for the rest of their lives and have regular medical check-ups.

Practical advice : if you feel fit and healthy, working is possible if you always use a condom for vaginal, oral and anal sex. You may also consider stopping sex work. If you need help in doing that, why not talk to someone who knows more about it (see addresses at the back of this booklet).

Interaction between HIV and STIs

There is interaction between hiv and STIs. That means that if you already have an STI, it is more likely that you will become infected with hiv during sex with a person that has hiv. And if someone has hiv and another STI, it is more likely that the hiv infection will be passed on. Syphilis in particular makes you more susceptible to hiv. If someone with hiv catches an STI, the symptoms may also be more serious because their body has less resistance to infection.

STIs caused by PARASITES

Trichomonas, pubic lice and scabies are caused by parasites. These STIs are less serious and easy to treat. But they can be a great nuisance. As long as you have not been treated, you are likely to infect others.

TRICHOMONAS (TRICH/TV)

Trichomonas knows no serious complications, such as infertility, but it is an STI that is easily transmittable. Trichomonas affects women in particular.

Men can also become infected but they usually have no symptoms.

Symptoms : your vagina may become inflamed and you may have milky discharge, sometimes yellowish/green. It smells unpleasant. The vulva and the inside of the vagina could be red, painful and swollen. Passing urine may also be painful. Sometimes there are no symptoms until some time after infection.

Treatment : anti-parasite medication.

Practical advice : the advice is not to have sex on the day you have treatment.

PUBIC LICE (CRABS)

Pubic lice can occur on any part of the body where there is hair, except on your head. They are usually transmitted during sexual contact and tend to live in pubic hair although they also occur in armpit hair and chest hair.

Symptoms : the first few weeks you won't notice anything. After that, your pubic hair may start to itch. Your skin may also become red and irritated.

You might see reddish-brown marks in your underwear. These are the faeces

that lice produce. There could be yellow, glassy dots on your pubic hair too. These are the lice eggs (nits).

Treatment : pharmacies sell lotions to treat pubic lice. Repeat the treatment after a week. Wash all the clothes you had on before treatment and all your bedding. That will get rid of the eggs completely. Air mattress and pillows too.

Practical advice : do not work on the day of the treatment.

SCABIES (THE ITCH)

Scabies is caused by a mite, a tiny insect that you can only see under a microscope. The females burrow their way into the skin and lay their eggs in these tunnels. Sometimes you can see the tunnels, particularly on your wrists and between your fingers. Scabies does not go away by itself and needs to be treated by a doctor. It is very infectious. It is mostly transmitted by body contact; you could get it during sex, but also by sleeping in a bed with someone who has scabies or by wearing that person's clothes.

Symptoms : severe itching over your whole body, particularly in a warm bed at night or during a shower.

Treatment : once your doctor has diagnosed scabies, you will be given a cream to rub into your whole body – except your head – after showering. The cream has to stay on for at least eight hours. Put on clean clothes and wash your bedding and clothes. Air mattress and pillows. It's important that your partner and other people you live with are treated too, even if they have no symptoms.

Practical advice : do not work during the treatment.

Other infections

Bacterial vaginosis and candidiasis (thrush) are not STIs but do often occur among sex workers. Under normal circumstances, the acidic level in your vagina is in balance. But there are things that can cause an imbalance, such as taking antibiotics or other medication for a long time, pregnancy, or washing the vagina frequently with soap or vaginal douches. This can allow certain bacteria to grow, and lead to other symptoms.

BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS

A common cause of bacterial vaginosis is Gardnerella vaginalis. You can carry these bacteria without realising it. Treatment is only necessary if there are symptoms.

Symptoms : greyish-white discharge that smells sourish, like rotten fish. Sometimes there is itching. Men can become infected by the bacteria but usually have no symptoms.

Treatment : bacterial vaginosis is easy to treat with tablets.

Practical advice : the advice is not to work for a few days. If you keep working, your vagina will not heal properly.

CANDIDIASIS (THRUSH)

Candidiasis is caused by excessive growth of a harmless yeast. Many women carry this yeast with them without noticing it. Treatment is only necessary if there are symptoms.

Symptoms : the excessive growth can cause an infection in your vagina. You may then have thick discharge that looks like cottage cheese. Irritation, burning, redness and itching can also occur. The symptoms usually get worse just before your period.

Treatment : your doctor will give you a vaginal cream or vaginal tablets. A course of pills to take orally is an alternative treatment.

Practical advice : if the cream you are given is greasy, you won't be able to work during treatment because the grease will damage the condom. If you are given tablets or a cream which is not greasy, you can continue to work, even on the day of the treatment, unless your vagina is hurting a lot. The advice then is to wait a few days for your vagina to recover completely

tip

For information on STI and hiv you can also make an anonymous call to → Veilig vrijenlijn: **078 15 15 15** (nl), Aide info sida: **0800 20 120** (fr) → Helpline: **02 648 40 14** (en) Or check the website → **www.infosexwork.be**, **www.sensoa.be**, **www.soaids.nl** or **www.prostitutie.nl**

4

STI
TESTING

Having regular check-ups helps prevent the complications of STIs.

Read on to find out what you should know about STI testing.

Why do you need to have regular STI check-ups?

Even if you always work safely, it's still important to have regular STI check-ups. It is possible to have an STI without noticing it. A condom doesn't give complete protection against all STIs. Working safely won't always prevent STIs such as herpes, syphilis and genital warts being passed on. These are infections which can occur in a place that is not covered by a condom. Something may have happened, perhaps a burst condom. Or you may want to be absolutely sure after having sex that might not have been safe. Not all clients are 100% trustworthy.

How often should you be tested?

If you always work safely, we recommend having a test at least once a year. If the condom broke or slipped off, or you are not sure if the sex you had was completely safe, always go and see a doctor after 2 weeks. It is no use to go earlier because an STI cannot be detected earlier by means of an examination. An hiv and syphilis test can be done 3 months after unsafe sex. There is no point in doing it earlier because these infections can only be detected in the blood after 3 months. **Always ask for an examination if you have complaints.**

STI testing is not compulsory in Belgium. The club owner must, however, give you the opportunity to be tested for STIs. But no one is allowed to force you to have an STI test or an hiv test. You are also free to choose your own doctor. The person responsible can arrange for you to have an examination by the medical team of the organizations (Gh@pro, Pasop and Espace P).

What does STI testing involve?

STI testing consists of a **consultation**, a **physical examination** and the **result**.

The **consultation** is with a doctor or a social nurse. They will ask you about your symptoms, the amount of sexual contact (safe or unsafe), what kind of sex you've had, and whether you have had an STI before. They can determine better which STI you have to be examined for.

The **physical examination** consists of an internal examination with a speculum (metal instrument shaped like a duck's beak) to see whether your vagina and cervix look healthy. A cervical smear is taken to check for cervical cancer. The examination will also include a vaginal swab (= cotton swab) for chlamydia and gonorrhoea. For men, the examination includes a urine test or a urethral swab (in the urethra) for chlamydia and gonorrhoea. Some mucus is taken with a cotton swab. If necessary, a swab is also taken from your anus or throat. Finally, the doctor or nurse will take a blood sample and a urine sample.

The **results** are always given to you personally and never to anyone else. Sometimes the doctor can tell whether you have an STI by looking at the sample through a microscope. The swab, urine and blood sample are sent to a laboratory. It may take some time before you get the result, from a few days to one week or more. Normally you can call for the result. In general the results are handed over personally during the next visit of the doctor at your work place.

Some advice on STI testing

- Don't wash or douche your vagina just before the examination. That makes it more difficult for the doctor to see whether you've caught an STI.
- When you have your period, the blood will make it more difficult for the doctor to do an internal examination. A limited STI examination is possible during your period.
- If you have any problem with having a physical examination done, tell the doctor. Also tell him or her if you have another reason why you don't like having an internal/vaginal examination. Then the doctor can try to find a way of making things easier for you.
- If you have any questions, ask them.
- If you have to take antibiotics, make sure you take all of them. Often symptoms will disappear before you have taken all the tablets. But it's still important to take the whole course to make sure the infection has gone completely.
- Don't ever take any medication that you have left from a previous STI, or anything a friend or colleague gives you. After all, you don't know which STI you might have. There is not one drug to cure all infections; each STI needs separate treatment.
- Go back for another check-up if you have arranged that with your doctor. Sometimes the first course of treatment isn't enough to clear the infection completely.

How does the HIV test work?

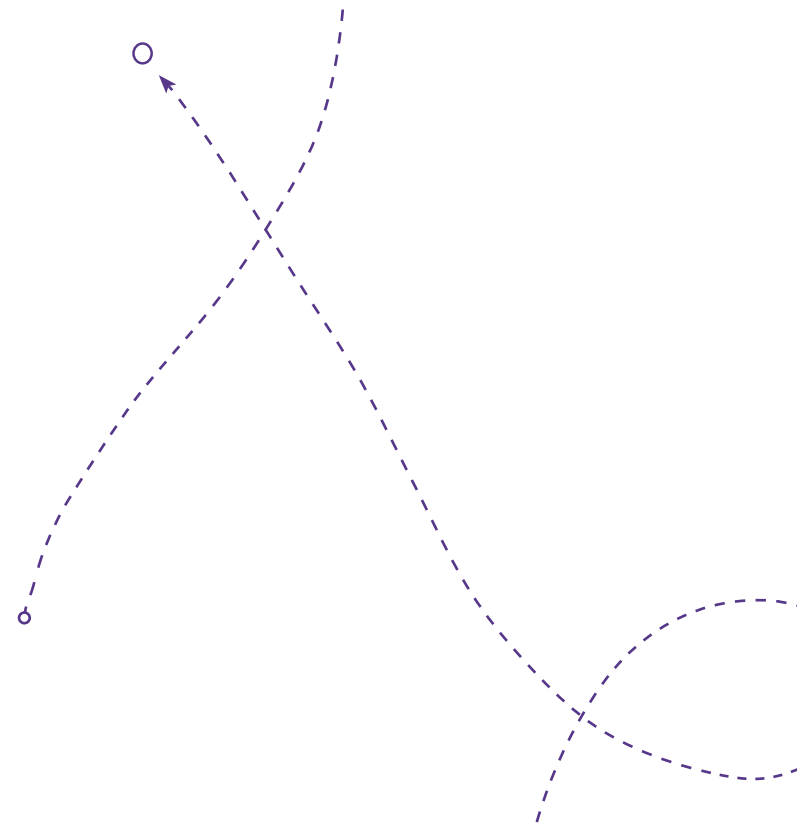
You can have a blood test done to determine whether you have been infected with hiv. Antibodies against the virus can be detected in your blood 3 months after infection. So if you have had unsafe sex or a burst condom and you want to be tested for hiv, there's no point in doing the test until 3 months later. After a blood sample has been taken, it takes one or 2 weeks before you get the result.

Who is told that you have an STI?

Only you. Nobody else will be given the result of an hiv test either. All doctors and nurses are bound by professional secrecy. It means that also the medical team that visits you is not allowed to tell the club owner anything about the test or the result. You have the right to see your own medical record, so just ask if you would like to do so. STI testing and an hiv test can also be done anonymously. This means that you don't have to give your real name. If you do have an STI, it's important that you warn your partner (and your clients, if possible). Then they can be tested too, and treated if necessary.

Where can you go for STI testing or an HIV test?

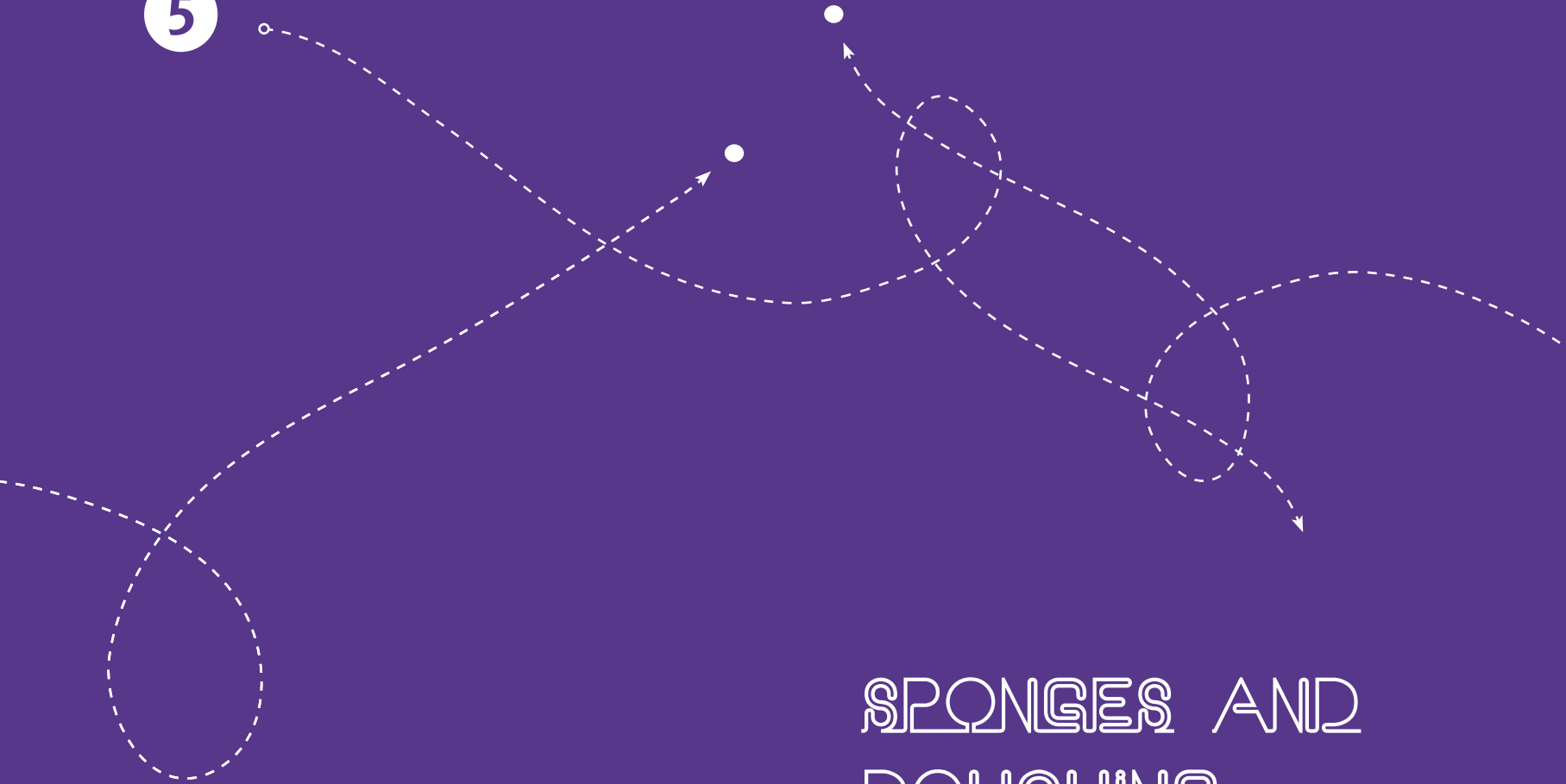
- 1 Organizations for sex workers that come to the work place or that hold consultations in their centre (Gh@pro, Pasop and Espace P).
- 2 Other organizations and reference centres (see the addresses at the back).
- 3 Family doctors in your neighbourhood.



DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE AT A GREATER RISK OF BECOMING INFECTED WITH ANOTHER STI, INCLUDING HIV, IF YOU HAVE ONE ALREADY?

That's because an STI irritates – and damages – the mucous membrane. This makes it easier for viruses and bacteria to enter your body, so you are more likely to get hiv or another STI.

5



SPONGES AND
DOUCHING

Working during your period is a nuisance. Taking a couple of days off is one way of solving that. It is not a bad idea to give your body — and your mind — a rest sometimes.

But if you want to keep on working, use a sponge.

Sponges

You can buy special sponges to soak up the blood during your period. There's the Europharma sponge or the Beppy sponge (wet or dry). All sponges **need to be used carefully**. That means: **only use them once** (so don't rinse and re-use). Never keep one in for longer than eight hours. **Always use a condom for sex**, even if you have a sponge in. There are sponges containing a substance that is said to reduce the risk of pregnancy and STIs. Don't use these sponges. The substance can irritate the lining of the vagina, making you more susceptible to infection with an STI. Don't use natural sponges or household sponges either. They're unhygienic, and small pieces could get caught in the vagina and cause an infection.

Douching

You may often suffer from increased discharge or fungal infections (thrush). Some women think that douching their vagina with a soapy solution after every client prevents this. But douching too often with (aggressive) soapy solutions dries out the mucous membrane of the vagina. It is this layer of mucus that maintains the acidic level in the vagina and its natural resistance to bacteria. Regular douching causes an imbalance, making you more susceptible to infection and giving you a dry vagina. If you still want to douche occasionally, use lukewarm water or a solution of water and lactacyd. But don't douche more than once a week. And never use Dettol, — it's much too aggressive. If you wear cotton underwear and don't use panty liners, you'll reduce the risk of a fungal infection. Increased discharge could be caused by an STI. If you are in any doubt, contact your doctor and get yourself tested.

6

PREGNANCY AND CONTRACEPTIVES

If you work as a sex worker, it is important to use a reliable contraceptive along with condoms to prevent STIs. An unwanted pregnancy would mean making some difficult decisions.

What you need to know are the most reliable methods for preventing pregnancy, what to do if something goes wrong, and what you need to watch out for if you do want to become pregnant.

Which contraceptives are reliable?

If you don't want to get pregnant, it is advisable to use condoms plus another reliable contraceptive. A condom protects you against pregnancy, of course, but there is always the risk of something going wrong. The condom could tear or slide off. Therefore, it is a good idea to use the condom together with another contraceptive, such as the contraceptive pill or "the pill" or the "contraceptive injection". If you do not use a contraceptive yet, go and see your doctor about it. Talk to the doctor about what contraceptive suits you and your lifestyle best. Never use another person's contraceptive. Always arrange your own contraceptive. Do not let anybody else do this for you. Below is a list of contraceptives and how they work.

1st choice:

- 1 The contraceptive pill:** contains hormones that make sure no eggs ripen. The eggs therefore cannot be fertilized. The sperm goes inside, but cannot unite with a ripe egg cell. The pill is very reliable when taken each day at a set time. The pills normally given in Belgium have a low level of hormones and they have hardly any side effects. They don't cause excessive hair growth. The pill is not reliable if you forget to take it for one or more days, or when you've been sick. Ask your doctor what you should do then. When you want to postpone your menstruation, you can skip the 'stop week' by starting the next pill strip immediately. If you stop taking the pill altogether, you can still become pregnant.
- 2 Contraceptive injection:** is an injection you are given by a doctor every 3 months. You do not have to think about taking a pill every day. Is reliable when the period between 2 injections is never longer than

3 months. The injection can cause blood loss between periods in the first few months. After that the period could stay away altogether.

When you stop using the contraceptive injection your periods will return. It is better not to use the injections when you wish to become pregnant within one or 2 years.

- ③ **Contraceptive patch:** is a contraceptive in the shape of a thin bandaid of about 4.5 by 4.5 centimetres, which is put on your skin. Must be changed every week for 3 weeks in a row. After these 3 weeks, you have a week without the bandaid, in which you will get your period. Is suitable for women between 18 and 45 years of age who are not heavier than 90 kilos.
- ④ **Vaginal contraceptive ring (Nuvaring):** is a flexible ring that contains hormones and is inserted into your vagina once a month. You insert the ring yourself, after 3 weeks you remove it again. You then have a week without and you will have your period.

Contraceptives that are less adequate if you work in prostitution

2nd choice:

- ① **The iud (coil):** is a device that is inserted into the womb by a doctor and prevents you from getting pregnant. Comes in different types. Mostly used is the coil wrapped in copper wiring. The copper coil is very reliable, but slightly less than the pill. Using a copper coil can lead to longer periods, with more blood loss and cramps. Another type of coil is the hormone coil. This coil is very reliable, as reliable as the pill. It can stay in your womb for 5 years. When you use a hormone coil, periods may decrease or

stop altogether. After removal of the coil you can get pregnant quite soon. It is important to test for chlamydia and gonorrhoea before the IUD is inserted. Sometimes you will get a short antibiotics treatment around the day when the IUD is inserted, so as to prevent upward infection. The chances of having an inflammation of a fallopian tube are bigger with both types of coils if you have many changing sex partners.

- ② **Implanon:** is a small tube that is inserted into your upper arm by a doctor. It lasts for 3 years. Could change your periods. Bleeding may become irregular and you can expect a different pattern in your cycle. Implanon is removed by a doctor by a small cut in the upper arm. Sometimes this is quite difficult.
- ③ **Sterilisation:** of a woman is an operation by a gynaecologist; the fallopian tubes are closed off. It means making a permanent choice. Therefore, it is good to know the advantages and the disadvantages of sterilisation. Take time to consider the possible alternatives.

Contraceptives that are unsuitable for sex work

bad choice:

- ① **Spermicide creams, suppositories (pessaries), ointment, jelly and foam:** because they are unreliable and constant use can damage the lining of your vagina.
- ② **Withdrawal (coitus interruptus):** unsuitable because you are not in control.
- ③ **The calendar and temperature method:** unsuitable because the calculation is unreliable and it means you can't work on certain days.

Reimbursement of contraceptives

In Belgium, contraceptives are only available at the chemist's with a doctor's prescription. At this moment, most contraceptives are reimbursed. The national health service (mutualiteit) can give you information about the repayment of other contraceptives such as the coil, patch, ring, implant and the new contraceptive pills. For young people under 21, there is an additional discount for all contraceptives of about 3 euros per month on presentation of your SIS-card.

What should you do if something goes wrong?

If you haven't used a contraceptive or something else has gone wrong (like forgetting to take the pill or a burst condom), you can get an emergency contraceptive pill (the 'morning-after' pill) at a pharmacy. You don't need a prescription. Do it as soon as possible, within 72 hours at the latest. After 72 hours, it is no use to take the morning-after pill. If your period is late, you could be pregnant. Have a pregnancy test done to find out. If it is an unwanted pregnancy, there are several ways to terminate the pregnancy. Always do this in consultation with a doctor or an organization that helps in case of an unwanted pregnancy.

- When you are more than 16 days late or pregnant, you can have an abortion. Preferably within 6 weeks and at the latest at 12 weeks (Belgian legislation). In the abortion clinic they discuss the advantages and disadvantages of an abortion with you. Afterwards, you are given 5 days time to think.
- The abortion pill is a method to interrupt a pregnancy. You can also discuss this method at the abortion centre. To qualify for this method, you may not be pregnant for more than 7 weeks.

If you need guidance or advice about the pregnancy or if you decide to have an abortion, please see the addresses in the back of this booklet.

What should you watch out for if you do want to become pregnant?

If you do want to become pregnant, have yourself tested for STIs. Some infections can be transmitted from a mother to her child. If you have an STI, there is then time for you to have treatment or take other measures to make sure you don't infect your baby. Tell the doctor or nurse that you are a sex worker and would like to become pregnant. They will then be able to give you better advice about your health and that of your baby.

Should you work if you're pregnant?

Sex work and pregnancy do not really go together. In the first period of your pregnancy you may, for example, have nausea or not want to have sex. Later on in your pregnancy sex may become difficult. Just as in any other job you need to go on pregnancy leave. Most sex workers want to stop earlier than the period of 6 weeks before giving birth which is customary in other jobs. Depending on your situation, you can take some time off.

Take good care of your body if you really can't stop working. Sex during the first 6 months cannot harm the baby inside you, however rough sex could be risky for you and your baby. Try changing your working hours, taking fewer clients, and resting more often. Only do sexual techniques and positions that you can cope with.

7



WORKING IN
THE SEX
INDUSTRY

Everyone wants to work safely and make sure they stay healthy. But in some circumstances that's easier said than done.

Here are some issues that you may come across if you work as a sex worker and some advice on what you can do about them.

How should you negotiate with clients?

It is important to decide exactly what you will do and what you won't do.

That's the only way to be in a strong position for negotiation. Appearing self-confident and being clear about what you say will make negotiations more convincing. Come to an agreement with your client beforehand. Make sure you agree on everything: what kind of sex you'll have, how long the client will stay, how much he'll pay. Of course you can agree on anything extra later, but that will cost more money. Make it clear to all your clients that you always work with condoms, that is something you will not negotiate on. Most clients will accept that, but some will still try to pressure you into risky sex without a condom. Some clients will even offer you more money to have sex without a condom. That may seem attractive at the time, but think about whether the extra money you earn is worth the risk of catching an STI. Some clients may want something (extreme) that you don't want to do. You can refuse a client like that. Never do anything you don't want to do. If you have a threesome, come to an agreement with your colleague beforehand too. About what you will and won't do, about payment and about safe sex. Not all clients are trustworthy. If you think there's something wrong, trust your intuition and don't take the client.

If you are abused or assaulted by a client, report it to the police.

At the back of this booklet you'll find addresses and telephone numbers of organizations that can help you.

What is the effect of alcohol and drugs?

You may drink alcohol regularly. One or 2 glasses make you feel relaxed, put you in a good mood, keep you alert. But if you drink too much, you may lose

control of the situation. You may find it harder to draw the line and not worry too much about safe sex. Alcohol is not without danger. Too much alcohol (more than 6-8 glasses a day) can damage your liver and your health. A lot of drinking goes on in clubs, but no one can make you drink: neither the owner nor the client.

Perhaps you take drugs and need money for that. Or you work to pay for your partner's drug or alcohol habit. That may mean that you are under pressure to work and this can also affect your negotiations with clients. If a client brings cocaine to share with you, remember that taking cocaine means you may take more risks. The combination of cocaine and alcohol might seem ideal: one gets you going while the other relaxes you. That way you can keep on for hours without feeling tired or drunk. But what you're also doing is giving your body a very hard time. If you have the feeling that your drug or alcohol habit is getting out of hand, go to someone for help. If you don't know anybody who can help you with your specific problems, get in touch with the social workers at Gh@pro, Pasop and Espace P. They will refer you to someone and give you information about alcohol and drug services.

tip

Did you know that nine out of ten women who are assaulted by clients later say that they had a feeling that there was something wrong with that client? **Always follow your intuition and refuse a client that you have a bad feeling about!**

If you are a sex worker, you have a right to:

- *work in safe and hygienic surroundings;*
- *refuse a client;*
- *refuse to do certain sexual techniques.*

And no one can:

- *force you to take alcohol or drugs;*
- *force you to work without a condom;*
- *decide when you should have STI testing done and which doctor you should go to.*

What should you do if you want to stop working as a sex worker?

Perhaps you sometimes think about leaving the sex industry. You might have just had enough, or maybe you have an STI that won't go away. But what should you do and where can you go? It's not easy to stop. There are other options though, go to the VDAB (Flemish Employment Agency) or contact the organizations for sex workers. They can give you assistance and advice and, together with you, look at the alternatives.

Organizations for sex workers in Belgium

ANTWERP

Women & Men

Gh@pro vzw

Verversrui 3
2000 Antwerp
T 03 293 95 91
M 0474 98 57 66
ghapro@telenet.be
www.ghapro.be

Men

Boysproject

T 03 293 95 90
boysproject@cawdeterp.be
www.boysproject.be

EAST AND WEST FLANDERS

Women & Men

Pasop

Brabantdam 100B
9000 Gent
T 09 233 47 67
pasop@skynet.be
www.pasop.info

Men

www.jongenskwartier.be

BRUSSELS

Women & Men

Espace P

Rue des Plantes 116
1030 Brussels
T 02 219 98 74
espacebxl@hotmail.com
www.espacep.be

Entre2

Boulevard d'Anvers 20
1000 Brussels
T 02 217 84 72
entre2bruxelles@gmail.com
www.entre2.org

Men

Alias

T 0484 60 80 47 (fr) - 0497 94 97 96 (nl)
info@alias-bru.be
www.alias-bru.be

THE WALLON REGION

Women & Men

Espace P

T 04 221 05 09 Luik
T 071 30 98 10 Charleroi
T 081 72 16 29 Namen
T 065 84 70 09 Bergen
www.espacep.be

Icar

T 04 223 18 26 Luik
T 071 50 63 44 Charleroi

Entre 2

T 04 223 67 02 Seraing
T 071 31 40 42 Charleroi

Useful telephone numbers

veilig vrijenlijn	078 15 15 15 (nl)	helpline	106 (nl)
aide info sida	0800 20 120 (fr)		107 (fr)
drugs - alcohol	078 15 10 20 (nl)		02 648 40 14 (en)
	02 227 52 52 (fr)	suicide prevention	02 649 95 55 (nl)
police	112		02 648 40 14 (en)
sos violence	02 534 36 36 (fr)		0800 32 123 (fr)

Useful websites

www.druglijn.be	www.caw.be
www.alcoholhulp.be	www.stopstalking.be
www.bekijkheteensnuchter.be	www.preventiezelfdoding.be
www.infordrogues.be	www.chsbelgium.org
www.tele-onthaal.be / www.tele-accueil.be	www.huisarts.be
www.slachtofferchat.be	www.prostitutie.nl

HIV - STI

www.sensoa.be (nl)

www.helpcenteritg.be (nl)

www.aideinfosida.be (fr)

www.soaaids.nl (nl)

Help in case of unwanted pregnancy

www.abortus.be

www.crz.be: call phone for all questions about unplanned pregnancy

T 078 15 30 45 (6:00 pm – 10:00 pm)

www.gacehpa.be (The Walloon Region) collectives contraception

Aids reference centres

ANTWERP • ITG • Kronenburgstraat 43/3 • 2000 Antwerp • T 03 247 64 65

BRUSSELS • UCL • Hippocrateslaan 10 • 1200 Brussels • T 02 764 36 39

BRUSSELS • UMC • Hoogstraat 290-322 • 1000 Brussels • T 02 535 31 77

BRUSSELS • VUB • Laarbeeklaan 101 • 1090 Brussels • T 02 477 60 01

BRUSSELS • Erasmus • Lenniksesteenweg 808 • 1070 Brussels • T 02 555 45 36

CHARLEROI • Boulevard Janson 92 • 6000 Charleroi • T 071 92 54 11

GENT • UZ • De Pintlaan 185 • 9000 Gent • T 09 332 23 45

LUIK • ULG • Quai Godefroid Kurth 45 • 4020 Luik • T 04 270 31 90

LEUVEN • KUL • Herestraat 49 • 3000 Leuven • T 016 34 47 75