



Alberta Indigenous Virtual Care Clinic
is proud to announce a new initiative

AIVCC HEALTH TIPS

The tips presented have been researched by our own
AIVCC doctors and partners.

This series will be focused on
**sexual health and reproductive
system concerns**

SEXUAL HEALTH



SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

The Public Health Agency of Canada defines sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as infections you can get from having sex with someone (vaginal, oral, or anal sex), as well as having intimate skin-to-skin contact.

The most common sexually transmitted infections include:

- Chlamydia
- Herpes
- Gonorrhea
- Syphilis
- Hepatitis
- Genital warts
- HIV/AIDs

It has been reported that Indigenous women in Canada have higher than average rates of STIs.



How do I protect myself from STIs?

Abstinence (not having sex) or the use of condoms



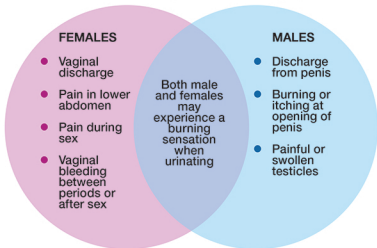
PRACTICE ABSTINENCE

It is important to remember that the use of other contraceptives (methods to avoid pregnancy like the birth control pill) do not prevent sexually transmitted infections!

A study conducted in Ontario found that 61% of Indigenous people of both sexes reported having not used a condom while only 8% reported that they always use them.

GONORRHEA/CHLAMYDIA

Males and females can experience different symptoms:



Symptoms from gonorrheal infection may occur 2 to 7 days after infection while the majority of people infected with chlamydia don't have symptoms at all. Also, chlamydia can infect the rectum, which may include symptoms of rectal pain, bleeding and discharge.

SYPHILLIS

Symptoms may include:

- A painless open sore on the genitals, anus or throat
- Body rash and/or flu-like symptoms
- Swollen glands (lymph nodes)

Reminder: some individuals may not develop symptoms when they have a sexually transmitted disease. If you have no symptoms but think you could have been exposed or are at risk, please talk to your local or AIVCC doctor or nurse practitioner. If you have developed symptoms, get tested.

GENITAL HERPES

- Sores will appear around the genitals (vagina, cervix, penis, testicles, anus, buttocks).
- Tender lumps in the groin (lymphadenopathy).
- Herpes is very painful, especially the first episode (unlike syphilis).

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)

- HPV is the virus that causes cervical cancer.
- Many people infected with HPV may have no symptoms.
- Warts may appear on or near the genitals, which will appear small and flat or cauliflower-like.



Schedule
your
Appointment

What should I do if I think I may have a sexually transmitted infection?

Contact your local or AIVCC doctor or nurse practitioner. They may recommend a test, which is commonly done with a urine or blood sample, and/or an in person exam.

You should consider getting tested when you have a new sexual partner, or if your partner is having sex with other people. You should also get tested if you have shared needles with others for drug use, tattoos, or piercings or have shared drug paraphernalia (snorting straws or crack pipes).

If you and your partner are exclusively seeing one another, you should still consider getting a test regularly to be safe.

Can drug use increase my risk of getting an infectious disease?

Individuals with substance use disorder may participate in unsafe behavior such as sharing needles/reusing drug paraphernalia and risky sexual behavior, which can increase the risk of:

YES!

- **Sexually transmitted infections**
(eg. chlamydia and gonorrhea)
- **Blood borne infections**
(eg. Hepatitis B and C and HIV/AIDs)



While many people are aware of the risk that sharing needles has, very few people know that sharing glass pipes for crack-smoking or snorting straws for cocaine use may also increase one's risk of hepatitis C.

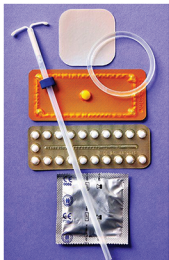
Crack smoking involves a glass pipe heating up, which can burn the lip. Snorting cocaine can cause irritation and bleeding in the nose. These injuries can cause the Hepatitis C virus to leave the body and contaminate equipment, and also enter the body from contaminated equipment.

Talk to your doctor if you are worried you might have been exposed to a sexually transmitted or blood borne infection. Your doctor can confidentially order lab blood and urine tests to test you, and call you with the results.

CONTRACEPTION

What are contraceptives?

Contraceptives are methods used to prevent pregnancy.



What type of contraceptives are available?

- Nuvaring
- Evra patch
- Pill
- Injection (Depo-provera)
- Intrauterine device (IUD)
- Nexplanon (small rod inserted just under the skin of your inner arm)
- Condoms



Statistics
Canada

Statistique
Canada

Statistics Canada has reported that young Indigenous women are more likely to become teen mothers than non-Indigenous women.

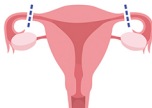


There are also permanent contraception options, such as vasectomy and tubal ligation (irreversible). These options should only be explored if you are certain you do not want to have any or more children.

Vasectomy is a surgical operations for men which involves cutting the tubes that sperm travels through. Tubal ligation, in women, involves cutting the fallopian tube preventing an egg from traveling to the ovaries.



MALE STERILIZATION
VASECTOMY



FEMALE STERILIZATION
TUBAL LIGATION

Contact your local or AIVCC doctor or nurse practitioner to discuss contraceptive options and which would be best for you if you are wanting to avoid pregnancy.

All the non-surgical contraceptives mentioned (pill, IUD, patch, injection, nexplanon) are covered under the non-insured health benefits (NIHB) for First Nations individuals.

Not many individuals are aware, but condoms are also covered under NIHB.



MOONTIME (MENSTRUAL CYCLE)

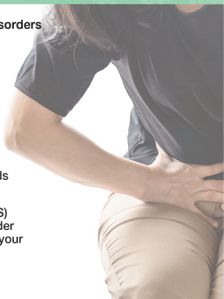
A normal moontime or menstrual cycle occurs every 21 to 35 days, with your menstrual period lasting for 4 to 7 days.



You can count how long your cycle is with day 1 beginning on the first day of your period and the last day being the day before your next period starts.

There are various menstrual disorders that may occur:

- No period at all (and you are not pregnant)
- Painful periods with severe cramping
- Heavy bleeding during periods
- Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) includes mood changes, tender breasts, and cramps (before your period starts)



ENDOMETRIOSIS

What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis occurs when endometrial-like tissue (tissue that lines the uterus) grows outside the uterus in areas such as the pelvis and abdominal cavity.



Who is at risk?

Women with a family-history of endometriosis are at an increased risk, as well as women who are giving birth for the first time after the age of 30.

Symptoms may include pelvic pain (pain in lower abdomen before and during menstruation), painful periods and heavy menstrual bleeding, painful sexual intercourse and/or infertility.

If you think you are at an increased risk for endometriosis or polycystic ovarian syndrome or are experiencing some of the symptoms, please consult your doctor or make an appointment with one of our doctors at AIVCC for testing.



POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN SYNDROME



What is PCOS?

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) describes a condition where small cysts (fluid-filled sacs) grow on the ovaries.

It occurs because the female body is producing an abnormal amount of a male sex hormone known as androgen.

Who is at risk?

Women with a family-history of polycystic ovarian syndrome are at an increased risk.

The exact cause is unclear. Insulin resistance is common with PCOS, so obese

You may have PCOS if you've noticed missed, irregular, or light periods, excess body hair, skin tags, large ovaries or ovaries with many cysts, weight gain, acne or oily skin, or infertility.

PERIMENOPAUSE & MENOPAUSE



Perimenopause occurs when your body starts to make the transition towards menopause, which marks the end of the reproductive years. In some women, perimenopause may start as early as mid-30s and can last anywhere from 2 to 10 years.

This occurs as a woman ages because the production of the female hormones, estrogen and progesterone, start to decline.

Menopause can occur when a woman reaches the age of 40s or 50s, marking the end of her menstrual cycle and reproductive years. You are said to have reached menopause after you've gone a whole year without having your period.

Symptoms of Menopause



Irregular periods



Vaginal dryness



Hot flashes



Sore or tender breasts



Chills



Night sweats



Sleep problems



Headaches



Weight gain and slowed metabolism



Mood changes

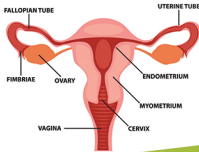


Thinning hair and dry skin



Memory problems

FEMALE GYNECOLOGICAL CANCERS



What types of cancers are of concern for females?

- Ovarian cancer
- Cervical (cervix) cancer
- Uterine cancer
- Vaginal cancer
- Vulvar cancer

A study published in 2010 found that the number of cervical cancer cases in Albertan First Nations women was 20 times higher than the general population. However, a study conducted at the University of Ottawa reported a decline in cervical cancer incidence though the prevalence is still high in Indigenous women.



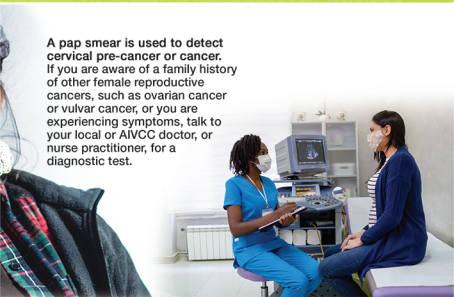
FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE CANCER SCREENING

Pap
Smear
9am

Alberta Health Services has a Cervical (Cervix) Cancer Screening Program for women aged 25-69.

Regular screening can help find cancers early so treatment can be started as soon as possible. If you are no longer sexually active, please still get regular screening until age 65.

A pap smear is used to detect cervical pre-cancer or cancer. If you are aware of a family history of other female reproductive cancers, such as ovarian cancer or vulvar cancer, or you are experiencing symptoms, talk to your local or AIVCC doctor, or nurse practitioner, for a diagnostic test.



MALE REPRODUCTIVE CANCER



Prostate cancer is the most common cancer found in men. 1 in 7 Canadian men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Prostate problems may also occur, including trouble urinating, blood in semen/urine and/or erectile dysfunction (inability to maintain an erection for sex). These can often be treated with medication.

Other than prostate cancer, male reproductive cancers include testicular cancer and penile cancer.

If you think you are at risk for developing any of the male reproductive cancers or have a family history or have noticed any unusual lumps or bumps on the testicles or penis, please **consult your local or AIVCC doctor or nurse practitioner.**

A yellow sticky note with handwritten text in black ink. The text reads "Schedule your Appointment". The note is placed over a background that includes a calendar grid with numbers like 3, 4, 5, 9, 16, 25, and 26 visible.

Schedule
your
Appointment

VACCINATIONS

Hepatitis B vaccine

- Hepatitis B is the leading cause of liver cancer.
- Children born before March 1, 2018 receive the hepatitis B vaccine in grade 6, with 2 doses 6 months apart.
- Children born after March 1, 2018 receive their hepatitis vaccine at 2, 4, and 6 months of age.
- Adults born before 1981 at risk and adults born after 1981 who did not receive the hepatitis B vaccine in school require 3 doses.
- Sometimes people who received a series of hepatitis B vaccines years ago need a booster. Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner if you think you need a booster. A blood test can be ordered to check your immunity.



There are vaccines available to offer protection against hepatitis B and HPV.

HPV vaccine (Gardasil)

- HPV is a common cause of cervical cancer and genital warts. It may also cause anal, penile, or vaginal cancer.
- Children get 2 doses of the HPV vaccine in grade 6, each dose 6 months apart.
- Two doses of the HPV vaccine are free to anyone under the age of 26.
- Any individual over the age of 26 who did not receive the HPV vaccine in school require 3 doses.

Although there is a vaccine for hepatitis B, there is no specific anti-viral treatment. On the contrary, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C but there are some excellent anti-viral treatments.

For more information found in this booklet, please contact our clinic and make an appointment with one of our doctors or please visit our website

for more resources:

<https://aivcc.ca/resources/>



The Sex&U website linked on our website is a great place to start educating yourself further on things discussed in this brochure.

For cancer screening or other questions, visit the Canadian Cancer Society website.

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