DOCTORS OF SOUTH MELBOURNE

STI Prevention

Bexsero • Doxy-PEP • Gardasil 9

Rates of gonorrhoea, syphilis, and HPV are on the rise across Australia. Some infections are becoming harder to treat due to increasing antibiotic resistance in the community.

The good news? A few new prevention tools, used alongside regular testing and condoms, can significantly reduce your risk.

Bexsero

What it does: Originally developed as a meningococcal B vaccine, Bexsero also offers partial protection against **gonorrhoea**, as the two bacteria are closely related.

Effectiveness: Helps reduce the risk of gonorrhoea infection by 30–40 %.

Dosage: Given as two injections, at least four weeks apart.

Possible side effects: You may experience a sore arm, mild fever, or tiredness for a day or two.

Doxycycline (Doxy-PEP) After Sex

What it does: Mostly used by men who have sex with men and transgender women who've had a recent bacterial STI, Doxy-PEP lowers the risk of **chlamydia, syphilis,** and **gonorrhoea** infection.

Effectiveness:

- Chlamydia & syphilis – Lowers risk by 65–75%
- Gonorrhoea – Lowers risk by around 50%
- Most effective when combined with condoms and regular STI testing

Dosage: A single 200 mg dose of doxycycline taken within 72 hours after condomless sex. Only take one dose in any 24-hour period.

Possible side effects: Mild nausea or increased sun sensitivity.

Antibiotic Resistance: What You Need to Know

Bacteria can adapt over time, making antibiotics such as doxycycline less effective.

Current concerns:

- Gonorrhoea resistance to doxycycline has grown from under 10% (2020) to over 30% (2024).
- People who use Doxy-PEP more than three times per month are more likely to carry resistant bacteria.
- Even normal "friendly" bacteria in the throat and skin can become resistant.

How to reduce your risk:

- Use Doxy-PEP only on your doctor's advice, not as a routine.
- Keep up STI testing every 3 months and use condoms where possible.

Gardasil 9

What it does: Gardasil 9 protects against nine strains of HPV responsible for most cervical, anal, and throat cancers, as well as genital warts.

While almost anyone can benefit, it's especially recommended for gay, bisexual and transgender people, and those with multiple partners.

Effectiveness: Prevents most HPV-related cancers and warts.

As part of the National Immunisation Program, Gardasil 9 is routinely offered to eligible students aged 12–13. The vaccine remains effective after sexual activity has begun.

Schedule: Age 26+ or immunocompromised: Three doses at 0, 2, and 6 months

Possible side effects: Typically very mild, similar to reactions from other vaccines, which include pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site. Very remote risk of anaphylaxis.

Combination Protection

Layer your protection for the best defence against STIs. It helps keep you and your community healthy:

- Vaccines – *Bexsero* (reduces gonorrhoea by ~30–40%) and *Gardasil 9* (prevents HPV-related cancers and warts)
- Doxy-PEP – lowers the risk of bacterial STIs by 50–75% when used correctly
- Condoms & regular testing – still essential for prevention and early detection
- Partner treatment – helps prevent reinfection and protects both partners