

## **Information for People Exposed to a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI): Getting Treatment Without Seeing a Doctor During the COVID-19 Outbreak**

*This document provides information for people who were exposed to a sexually transmitted infection (STI) and received treatment from a sex partner (prescription or medicine). Be sure to read both the [“General Information”](#) and [“Medicine Information”](#) sections.*

### **General Information**

#### **Why am I getting a prescription or medicine?**

One of your sex partners was diagnosed with and treated for one or more STIs. STIs are infections that spread during oral, anal or vaginal sex. A health care provider gave your sex partner a prescription or medicine(s) to give to you so that you too can be treated for the same STI(s). You need treatment so you do not develop serious health problems, re-infect your sex partner(s) or pass the infection to others.

#### **What infection(s) does my partner have?**

Your partner was diagnosed with one or more of these infections: chlamydia, gonorrhea or trichomoniasis (“trich”). **Most people with these STIs do not have symptoms.** If symptoms occur, they can occur in one or more parts of the body, depending on what body parts you use to have sex. Symptoms can include:

- Pain or burning during urination
- Pus or discharge (drip) from the penis, vagina or anus
- Itching or irritation in the vagina or penis
- Bleeding between periods
- Pain or bleeding during or after sex
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Rectal pain
- Bleeding or discharge from the anus or in bowel movements

You can give an STI to others even if you do not have symptoms. You need to take the medicine to avoid serious health effects.

#### **Why should I take this medicine?**

You need treatment so you do not develop serious health problems, re-infect your sex partner(s) or pass the infection to others. Even if you were diagnosed with and treated for an STI in the past, you can get it again. If left untreated, STIs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea or trich, can:

- Cause severe pain in the abdomen (belly), rectum (butt) or during urination
- Cause infertility (inability to get pregnant)

- Cause painful or swollen testicles
- Increase the risk of having a tubal (ectopic) pregnancy
- Make it more likely to get or spread HIV
- Cause premature labor, low infant birth weight or other harm to a fetus

### **Will this medicine cure all STIs?**

No, your medicine will not cure all STIs, but it will treat the same STI(s) that your partner was treated for. If you have STI symptoms, call your health care provider or the New York City Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. Visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](https://nyc.gov/health/clinics) for more information about the hotline, including hours of operation.

### **What should I do after taking this medicine?**

- **Do not have oral, anal or vaginal sex for at least seven days after you AND your sex partner(s) have been treated.** The medicine can take up to seven days to work. If you and your partner(s) do not wait at least seven days, the infection(s) could spread back and forth between partners and no one will be cured.
- Seeing a health care provider is usually best. It may be difficult to visit a health care provider during the COVID-19 outbreak, but many providers are offering services by telephone or video chat. Once it is safe for you to see a health care provider in person, be sure to get tested for STIs, including HIV.

### **What if I do not think I have an STI?**

You can have an STI even if you feel healthy and do not have any symptoms. You may not be able to get tested until it is safe to see a health care provider in person. You should take the medicine now and not wait to get tested.

### **What if I am pregnant or think I may be pregnant?**

Some medicines, such as azithromycin, cefixime and metronidazole, can be taken by people who are pregnant or think they may be pregnant. **People who are pregnant or think they may be pregnant SHOULD NOT take doxycycline.** Review the "[Medicine Information](#)" section below for more information.

Regardless of what medicine you need to take, if you are pregnant, you should also talk to a health care provider as soon as possible. Tell them that you were treated for an STI because your sex partner had it. You should also ask if you need to be tested or treated for other STIs because some can be passed on to your fetus.

### **I received a prescription from my partner. What can I expect from the pharmacy?**

When you get the prescription filled, the pharmacist may ask for your name, address, date of birth and form of payment (such as insurance, co-pay or out-of-pocket).

## What if I can't pay for the medicine?

Call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. Visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](https://nyc.gov/health/clinics) for more information about the hotline, including hours of operation.

## Have safer sex

STIs are common — millions of people get them each year. You can prevent most STIs, including HIV, by using a latex condom every time you have oral, anal or vaginal sex. You can also prevent HIV with pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a safe and effective daily pill that can greatly reduce your risk of HIV infection or post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), an emergency medication for people who are HIV negative and may have been exposed to HIV. If you think you were exposed to HIV, call the NYC PEP hotline at 844-3-PEPNYC (844-373-7692). The NYC PEP hotline is available 24/7.

For more information on having safer sex during the COVID-19 outbreak, review the “[Information on safer sex and coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/health/coronavirus)” document under the Prevention and Care tab at [nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/health/coronavirus).

## Medicine Information

There are many medicines that can treat different STIs. The type(s) of medicine you received or were prescribed depends on what STI(s) your partner was treated for.

Scroll down or click on these links to review information specific to the medicine(s) you were prescribed or received: [Azithromycin](#) (Zithromax), [Cefixime](#) (Suprax) or [Cefpodoxime](#) (Vantin, Bantan), [Doxycycline](#) (Vibramycin), [Metronidazole](#) (Flagyl).

### Azithromycin (Zithromax)

- **Safety**
  - Azithromycin is safe and very effective when taken correctly.
  - **DO NOT** take azithromycin if any of the following are true:
    - You are allergic to or have ever had a bad reaction (such as breathing trouble, chest tightness, closing of the throat, swelling of the lips or tongue, rash) or allergy to any antibiotics, including azithromycin (Zithromax), erythromycin or clarithromycin (Biaxin).
    - You have any serious, long-term health problems like kidney, heart or liver disease; have seizures; or are taking blood thinners.
  - If you have any of these problems, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. For operating hours, visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](https://nyc.gov/health/clinics).
  - You should also call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline to speak to a health care provider if any of the following are true:
    - You have lower stomach pain, cramps, unusual vaginal discharge with a bad odor, pain or bleeding during sex or bleeding between periods.

- You have a burning sensation when you urinate, nausea, fever or pain in your testicles.
- **How to take the medicine**
  - Take the medicine by mouth. Do not share it with others. You need to take the full treatment for it to work.
  - Take the pills as directed on the prescription or bottle, and be sure to finish all of the pills.
  - Take them with food to avoid an upset stomach.
  - If you throw up within an hour of taking the medicine, you will have to take another dose since the medicine may not have worked. To get more medicine, call the telephone number on the prescription, or call a health care provider.
  - If you have any questions, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. For operating hours, visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](http://nyc.gov/health/clinics).
- **Side effects**
  - Some side effects are common and not dangerous. These include diarrhea, nausea, stomachache, headache and throwing up. These side effects should not last long after you take the medicine.
    - If you throw up within an hour of taking the medicine, you will have to take another dose since the medicine may not have worked. To get more medicine, call the telephone number on the prescription, or call your health care provider.
  - It is rare, but some people do experience serious allergic reactions to azithromycin. These reactions can cause breathing trouble, chest tightness, closing of the throat, swelling of the lips or tongue and hives (itchy bumps on the skin). If you experience any of these reactions after taking this medicine, immediately call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

### **Cefixime (Suprax) or Cefpodoxime (Vantin, Bantan)**

- Cefixime and cefpodoxime belong to the same family of antibiotics called “cephalosporins.” The information below applies to cefixime, cefpodoxime and other cephalosporins.
- **Safety**
  - Cefixime and cefpodoxime are safe and very effective when taken correctly.
  - **DO NOT** take cefixime or cefpodoxime if any of the following are true:
    - You are allergic to or have ever had a bad reaction (such as breathing trouble, chest tightness, closing of the throat, swelling of the lips or tongue, rash) or allergy to any antibiotics, including ceftriaxone (Rocephin), penicillin antibiotics (such as ampicillin, amoxicillin or Augmentin, Pen-VK, penicillin G benzathine [Bicillin L-A]).
    - You have any serious, long-term health problems like kidney, heart or liver disease or gastrointestinal diseases, especially colitis (condition that causes swelling in the lining of the colon or large intestine).
    - You have seizures or are taking blood thinners.

- If you have any of these problems, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. For operating hours, visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](http://nyc.gov/health/clinics).
- You should also call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline to speak to a health care provider if any of the following are true:
  - You have lower stomach pain, cramps, unusual vaginal discharge with a bad odor, pain or bleeding during sex, or bleeding between periods.
  - You have a burning sensation when you urinate, nausea, fever or pain in your testicles.
- **How to take the medicine**
  - Take the medicine by mouth. Do not share it with others. You need to take the full treatment for it to work.
  - Take the pills as directed on the prescription or bottle, and be sure to finish all of the pills.
  - Take the medicine with food to avoid an upset stomach.
  - If you throw up within an hour of taking the medicine, you will have to take another dose since the medicine may not have worked. To get more medicine, call the telephone number on the prescription, or call a health care provider.
  - If you have any questions, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. For operating hours, visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](http://nyc.gov/health/clinics).
- **Side effects**
  - Some side effects are common and not dangerous. These include diarrhea, nausea, stomachache, headache and throwing up. These side effects would not last long after you take the medicine.
    - If you throw up within an hour of taking the medicine, you will have to take another dose since the medicine may not have worked. To get more medicine, call the telephone number on the prescription, or call your health care provider.
  - It is rare, but some people do experience serious allergic reactions to cephalosporins such as cefixime or cefpodoxime. These reactions can cause breathing trouble, chest tightness, closing of the throat, swelling of the lips or tongue and hives (itchy bumps on the skin). If you experience any of these reactions after taking this medicine, immediately call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

## **Doxycycline (Vibramycin)**

- **Safety**
  - Doxycycline is safe and very effective when taken correctly.
  - **DO NOT** take doxycycline if any of the following are true:
    - **You are pregnant, think you could become pregnant in the next two weeks or are currently breastfeeding.**
    - You have ever had a bad reaction (such as breathing trouble, chest tightness, closing of the throat, swelling of the lips or tongue, rash) or allergy to any antibiotics, including doxycycline (Vibramycin), minocycline (Minocin), tetracycline (Panmycin).

- You are taking blood thinners or anti-seizure medications, or penicillin antibiotics.
    - You have any serious, long-term health problems like kidney, heart or liver disease.
  - If any of these apply to you, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. For operating hours, visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](http://nyc.gov/health/clinics).
  - You should also call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline to speak to a health care provider if any of the following are true:
    - You have lower stomach pain, cramps, unusual vaginal discharge with a bad odor, pain or bleeding during sex or bleeding between periods.
    - You have a burning sensation when you urinate, nausea, fever or pain in your testicles.
- **How to take the medicine**
  - Take the medicine by mouth. Do not share it with others. You need to take the full treatment for it to work.
  - Take the medicine as directed on the prescription or bottle and be sure to finish all of the pills. The medicine will cure your infection only if you take it as directed and do not miss any doses.
  - Take the medicine with food to avoid an upset stomach.
  - Do not consume dairy products or take vitamin supplements (such as calcium or magnesium) within two hours of taking the medicine.
  - If you throw up within an hour of taking the medicine, you will have to take another dose since the medicine may not have worked. To get more medicine, call the telephone number on the prescription, or call a health care provider.
  - If you have any questions, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. For operating hours, visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](http://nyc.gov/health/clinics).
- **Side effects**
  - Some side effects are common and not dangerous. These include diarrhea, nausea, stomachache, heartburn, throwing up or mouth soreness. Doxycycline can also cause sun sensitivity (including skin rash, itching, redness or discoloration of the skin) when exposed to a lot of sunlight.
    - If you throw up within an hour of taking doxycycline, you will have to take another dose since the medicine may not have worked. To get more medicine, call the telephone number on the prescription, call your health care provider or call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959.
  - It is rare, but some people do experience serious allergic reactions to doxycycline. These reactions can cause breathing trouble, chest tightness, closing of the throat, swelling of the lips or tongue and hives (itchy bumps on the skin). If you experience any of these reactions after taking this medicine, immediately call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

## **Metronidazole (Flagyl)**

- **Safety**

- Metronidazole is safe and very effective when taken correctly.
- **DO NOT** take metronidazole if any of the following are true:
  - You have lower belly pain or pain during sex.
  - You are vomiting or have a fever.
  - You have ever had a bad reaction (such as breathing trouble, chest tightness, closing of the throat, swelling of the lips or tongue, rash) or allergy to metronidazole (Flagyl) or other medicines.
  - You have a serious long-term illness, such as kidney, heart or liver disease.
- **If you are breastfeeding**, pump your breast milk and throw it away (“pump and dump”). **DO NOT feed that breast milk to your child.** Continue to “pump and dump” your breast milk until 24 hours after you have finished taking the medicine. Pumping will maintain your milk supply and dumping the breast milk will ensure your baby does not get exposed to the medicine.
- If you have any of these problems, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. For operating hours, visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](http://nyc.gov/health/clinics).
- **How to take the medicine**
  - Take the medicine by mouth. Do not share it with others. You need to take the full treatment for it to work.
  - Take the pills as directed on the prescription or bottle, and be sure to finish all of the pills.
  - Take the medicine with or without food. Taking it with food may help prevent an upset stomach.
  - **Take the pills at least 12 hours after you last consumed an alcoholic beverage. Wait at least three days after taking the medicine before consuming alcoholic beverages.** Using metronidazole and alcohol together may cause abdominal cramps, nausea, vomiting, headaches and redness of the face.
  - If you throw up within an hour of taking the medicine, you will have to take another dose since the medicine may not have worked. To get more medicine, call the telephone number on the prescription or call a health care provider.
  - If you have any questions, call the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at 347-396-7959. For operating hours, visit [nyc.gov/health/clinics](http://nyc.gov/health/clinics).
- **Side effects**
  - Most people have no side effects from metronidazole. Some people may get diarrhea, stomachache, dizziness or taste of metal in the mouth. These side effects are not usually serious.
  - **Drinking any alcohol with this medicine can cause a severe reaction that may include stomach upset, nausea, vomiting and headache.**
  - It is rare, but some people do experience serious allergic reactions to metronidazole. These reactions can cause fever, joint pain, numbness or tingling of hands and feet, seizures, trouble breathing, chest tightness, closing of the throat, itching or swelling of the lips or tongue and rash or hives (itchy bumps on the skin). If you experience any of these reactions after taking this medicine, immediately call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

**The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.**

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