What is my role in Contact Tracing?

When making an STI diagnosis, it is your responsibility to initiate a discussion about contact tracing. As part of good clinical care, your role is to encourage and support your patient in notifying their contacts.

For more on medico-legal matters see Chapter 5 of Australasian Contact Tracing Manual.

How to Contact Trace

1. **Introduce the reasons** for contact tracing.
   - ‘It’s really important your partner(s) get treated so you don’t get the infection again’.
   - ‘Most people with an STI don’t know they have it because they have no symptoms, but still could have complications or pass it onto a partner’.

2. **Help identify which partner(s)** need to be informed; use cues such as location or events. Use a non-judgemental approach; some people have more than one sexual partner and all can be treated.
   - ‘Try thinking back to when and where you have had sex recently or any special events’.

3. **Explain the methods and offer choice**. Different methods (in person, phone, SMS, email or letter) might be needed for each partner.

   - **Patient Initiated Referral**: Your patient chooses to notify their own contacts; you discuss with them the information they will provide to their contacts.
   - **Provider Initiated Referral**: You, your delegate or another health agency informs the patient’s contacts; get the consent of your patient; it can be anonymous or not depending on the wishes of your patient.

   ‘From what you’ve told me there are a few people who need to be informed. How do you think you’ll go contacting them?’

4. **Support Patient Initiated Referral**
   - Provide specific STI information – written or web links.
   - Discuss how a partner might react and problem solve with the patient.
   - Remind them partners could be contacted by telephone, in person, SMS, email or letter. All can be anonymous or not.
   - www.letthemknow.org.au
   - www.thedramadownunder.info for MSM*
   - Your practice staff may be able to assist your patient to send an SMS or email before they leave your clinic. It is a quick and easy option.
   - Provide treatment letter(s) to be given to contacts; see www.gpnsw.com.au for downloadable templates.
   - Schedule a follow up visit or phone call to determine if the patient was able to inform their partners. If not notified, offer further assistance.

5. **Document discussions** in patient notes.

   *Men who have sex with men

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Why Contact Trace?**
  It can prevent re-infection in your patient and decreases the rates of STIs in the population. As many STIs have no symptoms past partners may be unaware they are transmitting the infection.

- **How can I fit it into the consultation?**
  It can be completed quickly through a simple discussion at diagnosis or follow-up. If provider referral is chosen a practice nurse could inform the patient’s partners or assist in making follow up phone calls.

- **Why does my patient need to contact trace partners with whom they used condoms?**
  Condoms are effective protection but not equally for all STIs and not if inadequately used during oral sex and foreplay.

- **My patient is concerned about violence if they inform their partner(s), what should I do?**
  If there is concern over a violent reaction or history of domestic violence within a relationship then provider referral is recommended. In this situation, contact your local sexual health clinic.


When to consider provider referral...

- **HIV, syphilis and gonorrhoea** due to higher morbidity.
- **Repeat infections** as a partner may not have been tested and treated.
- **Within Aboriginal communities** due to stigma and issues around confidentiality.
- **Incarcerated or detained** partners may be more difficult to contact.
- **Casual or ex-partners** who are less likely to be notified.
- **If the patient requests**.

For more information about **undertaking provider referral contact tracing** see the Need Help & Online Resource sections.
### Need More Help

**Call the NSW Sexual Health Infoline on 1800 451 624** for information and support with contact tracing.


Support is available for complicated contact tracing from your local sexual health clinic.


### How Far Back in Time to Trace*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infection</th>
<th>How far back to trace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhoea</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>Primary syphilis – 3 months plus duration of symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary syphilis – 6 months plus duration of symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early latent syphilis – 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Start with recent sexual or needle-sharing partners; outer limit is onset of risk behaviour or last known negative result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis B</td>
<td>6 months prior to onset of acute symptoms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For newly acquired cases contact your local public health unit (PHU) &amp;/or specialist physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis C</td>
<td>6 months prior to onset of acute symptom; if asymptomatic, according to risk history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For newly acquired cases contact your local PHU &amp;/or specialist physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Note - rarely sexually transmitted, usually only in HIV co-infection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichomoniasis</td>
<td>Unknown; important to treat current partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mycoplasma genitalium</td>
<td>Unknown; important to treat current partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lymphogranuloma Venereum (LGV)</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information adapted from 2010 Australasian Contact Tracing Manual.

### Online Contact Tracing Resources

**Patient**

- [www.letthemknow.org.au](http://www.letthemknow.org.au)
  - Information on STIs & practical tips for patients. Offers the option of notifying contacts via email, SMS or letter.
- [www.thedramadownunder.info](http://www.thedramadownunder.info)
  - For MSM with information about STIs. Offers the option of notifying contacts via email or SMS.
- [www.bettertoknow.org.au](http://www.bettertoknow.org.au)
  - For Aboriginal People STI information, how & where to access STI Testing. Offers the option of notifying contacts anonymously via email or SMS.

**Provider**

- GP NSW - Contact Tracing
- Australasian Contact Tracing Manual
- NSW Contact Tracing Guidelines
- NSW Health STI Factsheets
- NSW Health Infectious Diseases A-Z Index
- Contact Tracing Interview Video

*Men who have sex with men

### Management of Contacts

Ensure access to **prompt testing and treatment.** This can be at your practice or through a referral to the local sexual health clinic. For treatment information see the **National Management Guidelines For STIs.**

* If contact tests positive, determine if any additional partner(s) need to be notified.
* Offer **vaccination** for hepatitis B.
* Waiting for results can be a period of anxiety; **information and supportive counselling** is helpful.
* Discuss ways to **reduce risk behaviours** such as condom use and regular testing for STIs.
