

General Principles

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Contact tracing relies on the cooperation of the patient and, in many cases, the patient can perform independent contact tracing using anonymous social media platforms [The Drama Downunder](#), [Let Them Know](#) or [Better To Know](#). It is important that health care providers offer supportive, non-judgmental advice and assistance to patients and their contacts. Patients should be informed that their sexual history is confidential. Most individuals feel notifying partners is the 'right thing to do'. However, they also want advice and support from their health care provider on how to approach this. The role of the health care provider is also educational - to assist in the monitoring of the patient to inform the index patient and contacts about the implications of infection, modes of transmission, prevention and treatment options.

In some cases, the general practitioner will enable contact tracing or request assistance from local sexual health physicians or contact tracers.

Tips for success

DO

- Have contact tracing permanently on your checklist for managing STIs.
- Gain the goodwill and cooperation of the patient. Well-informed patients are more likely to contact partners.
- Personalise the discussion to the patient and their circumstances rather than 'public health' implications
- Educate the patient about the STI. Inform them about asymptomatic infections, potential complications of untreated infection and the possibility of re-infection if an infected partner is not treated.
- Advise the patient that their contact can be confidentially and anonymously notified, should they feel uncomfortable notifying their contact in person[1].
- Understand the patient's particular situation and identify individual barriers to notifying contacts. Inform patients that for many individuals who discuss their STI diagnosis with a partner, the experience is better than they had anticipated[2].

DON'T

- Just concentrate on the patient's most recent risky exposure. Ensure a comprehensive sexual history is collected.
- Appeal to the 'wider public good' when discussing why it is necessary to notify contacts, try to personalise the discussion.
- Assume the patient's relationship status.
- Assume the gender of contacts.
- Ask questions that imply a judgement.

References

[1] Hopkins, C.A., Temple-Smith, M.J., Fairley, C.K. et al. Telling partners about chlamydia: how acceptable are the new technologies? *BMC Infect Dis* 10, 58 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2334-10-58>

[2] Bilardi JE, fairley CK, Hopkins CA, et al, Experiences and Outcomes of Partner Notification Among Men and Women Recently Diagnosed With Chlamydia and Their Views on Innovative Resources Aimed at Improving Notification Rates, *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*: April 2010 - Volume 37 - Issue 4 - p 253-258 doi: [10.1097/OLQ.0b013e3181d012e0](https://doi.org/10.1097/OLQ.0b013e3181d012e0)

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