

Dear Jabulani

You are right to ask for advice. Warts or pimples on the penis or on a girl's genitals can be just pimples, like spots on the face, or they can be signs of a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

If you have never had sex, you almost certainly don't have an STI. However, if you recently had sex without a condom, the pimples could be a sign of STIs like genital warts, syphilis, chancroid or genital herpes. Your Form 2 teacher was probably referring to syphilis which can lead to mental illness if untreated. You need to get diagnosed and start treatment as soon as possible.

If you have an STI, it's important to tell your sexual partner or partners so they can be treated too. Women, especially, can have an STI but show no signs.

So, please go to the clinic immediately. Most STIs are easily cured if you treat them quickly. Take a friend or adult you trust to support you in case the staff are unhelpful or criticise you. You have a right to good treatment without any rudeness. Good luck.

Auntie Stella

ACTION POINTS

● ANSWERS: STIs quiz

Statements 1 and 5 are TRUE. Statements 2, 3 (abstinence is also safe!) and 4 (different STIs have different signs, and women often have no signs) are FALSE.

● PROJECT: Use Ministry of Health brochures or other information on different STIs. Each group chooses one STI and prepares a talk for the others. Tell them this information, if it's available:

- What's the name of this STI? (medical and ordinary names)
- What are the signs of this STI? (in men and in women)
- What is the treatment for this STI?
- How can you avoid getting this STI?

Afterwards, make up 10 questions about everything you have learnt about STIs. Keep the answers on a separate paper. Swap tests with another group, answer their questions and then mark the one you gave them to do. Who got the highest mark?

- ## ● Invite a nurse or health worker to talk to you about STIs and your right to sympathetic and helpful treatment. Find out exactly what happens when a young person goes to the clinic with an STI problem. If clinics in your area aren't sympathetic, how can you improve the situation? Who can help you?