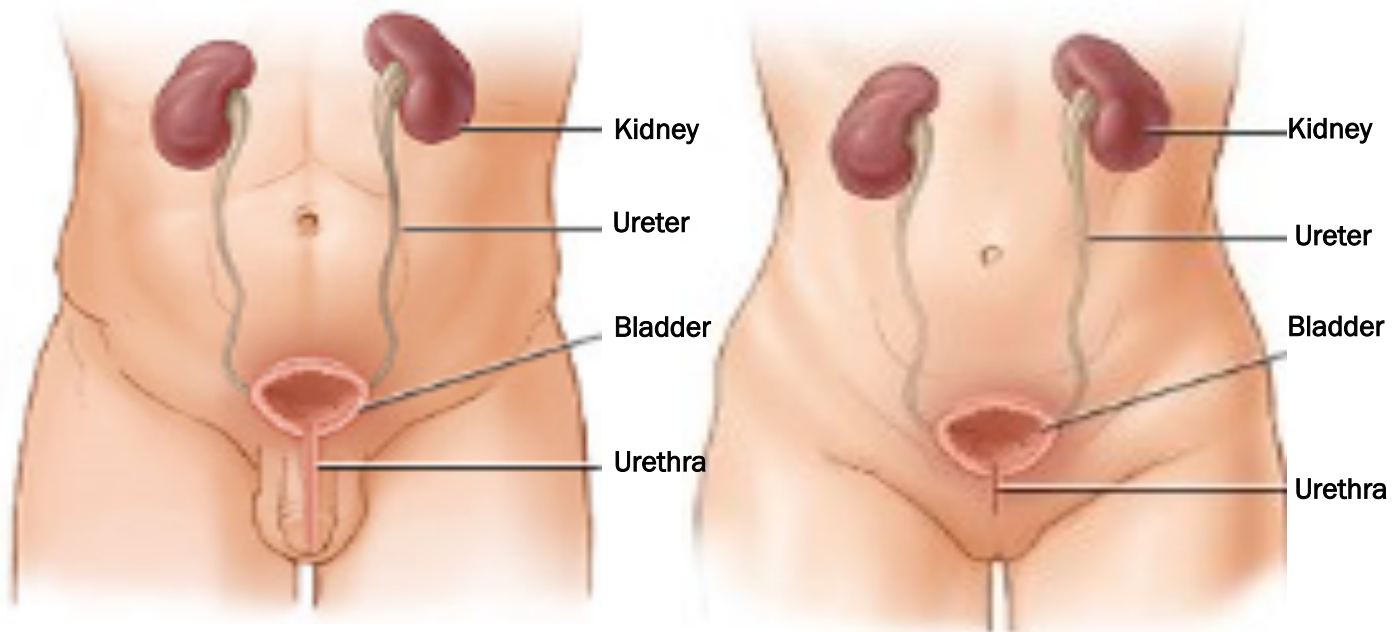


Urinary Tract Infections

What is a urinary tract infection?

Urinary tract infections (commonly referred to as “UTIs”) are infections of the urinary system—meaning the **urethra** (the small tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body), the **bladder**, the **ureters** (the ducts that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder), and the **kidneys**.

UTIs are common, and often happen in the lower urinary tract (the urethra and bladder). *Cystitis* is an infection of the bladder, and *urethritis* is an infection of the urethra. If a UTI spreads upwards to the ureters or kidney, this can be very serious. UTIs are treated with antibiotics.



<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Health/aftercareinformation/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=uh5234>

UTIs can affect both men and women, though they tend to be more common in women because of a woman’s body structure. Women have a shorter urethra—meaning that the distance bacteria needs to travel from the outside of the body to the bladder is shorter—and because their urethra is closer to the anus, it is easier for bacteria to enter the urethra, after wiping from a bowel movement, or from sexual activity. Also, as women age and enter menopause, they can become more prone to UTIs, as their body produces less estrogen and the lining of their urinary tract changes.

What are the signs of a UTI?

- More frequent trips to the bathroom; new accidents
- Pain when peeing (listen for noises, look for grimaces)
- Pee that smells bad
- Pee that looks darker or cloudy; stains on underwear
- Abdominal pain (holding/favoring abdomen)
- **BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**
- Pain in the back and side (“flank pain”)



Time for the doctor!

If a UTI has spread up into the kidneys, there will also be other key signs:

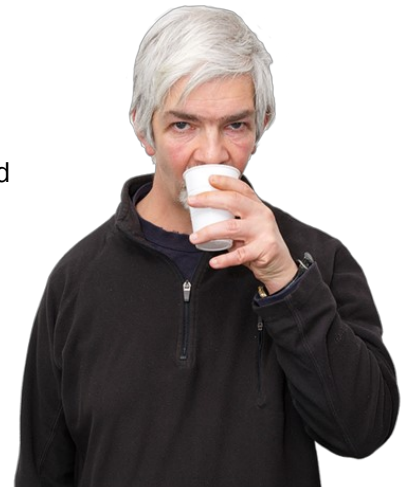
- High fever, chills, nausea/vomiting
- Increased confusion, or behaviour change.

If you notice any of these symptoms in a person you support, it is wise to inform the doctor as soon as possible. A UTI can cause much discomfort for a person.

While waiting, encourage the person to drink lots of water (as safely indicated) and offer pain relief and comfort measures (like a heating pad).

What are some things that make UTIs more likely to develop?

- Female anatomy.
- Poor personal hygiene/wiping techniques (mistakenly wiping from back to front, pulling bacteria into the urethra).
- Sexual intercourse (especially when it is coupled with poor personal hygiene).
- Catheter use.
- Incontinence and/or sitting in soiled underpants/briefs.
- Dehydration from not drinking enough fluids.
- Compromised immune system (which makes it harder to fight infections).
- Having a blockage anywhere in the urinary tract (e.g. a kidney stone, enlarged prostate in men).



How you can help with a suspected UTI?

#1) Assist with a urine collection:

Ideally, a urine sample is “mid-stream”, or a “clean catch”, which means that a person pees for a bit first (to flush out any outlying bacteria), then a sample is taken. The sample must be ‘caught’ in a sterilized container (the doctor’s office can provide this). This reduces the chance for a contaminated sample (and increases the chance of an effective treatment).

- **Explain and teach** why this is important. **Ask** the person if you can help.
- **Practice first.** This may take a few attempts. Try to teach a person, by practicing at the tap (turning the water on, letting it run for 1-2-3, then sliding the container in, then pulling it away). Once this step is learned, move to the toilet and practice sliding the container in between the legs a few times, before trying to pee in it. Wearing gloves may be helpful if the person will be upset if pee gets on their hands—encourage the person to get familiar with gloves too.
- **Be prepared.** Ensure the person’s genital area is wiped as clean as possible before peeing.
- **Break the task down.** Cue a person while they are on the toilet, by explaining each step as they go. Based on the person’s preferences, you may want to write this out, step by step (with or without pictures), or, you could be in the bathroom alongside them, providing single step verbal instructions and gestures.
- **Try a device.** See if the local medical supply store (or online) sells devices that can assist with collecting the sample. The “Peezy Midstream” is an example of a device that may help. →
- **Get extra help.** If someone wears briefs, or does not use a toilet, a sample may need to be extracted from the incontinence brief. Speak to the doctor/nurse about strategies for this.
 - If further assistance is still needed, it may be worth trying to advocate with the doctor and home care coordinator, to request a home visit from a nurse. In some situations, a person may need to be catheterized in order to get a sample.



#2) Focus on prevention:

- Drink water!
- Review wiping techniques—front to back.
- If a person is sexually active, encourage them to pee as soon as possible after having sex.
- Review the signs of a UTI, and encourage the people you support to share these with you if they ever notice them.



For more information: *Trouble with your Waterworks*, 2006 (Paynor and Naish)
Available at: [http://easyhealth.org.uk/listing/bowel-and-bladder-\(leaflets\)](http://easyhealth.org.uk/listing/bowel-and-bladder-(leaflets))