Can I get an STI from a toilet seat?

It's very unlikely, unless you’re having sex with someone ON the toilet seat!

People get sexually transmitted infections (STIs) from intimate contact with other people... most commonly in bedrooms, not bathrooms.

Let’s talk through a scenario: for “standard” toilet use, an organism would have to survive on the toilet seat, itself an unlikely prospect, since bacteria and viruses need human cells, moisture, and body heat to live. Cold, hard, dry plastic is not good for STI growth. Hooray!

Next, your body (genitals, buttocks, legs) would have to make direct, prolonged contact with a thriving organism on the seat. Very unlikely. Even after you add up all the “what ifs,” STI-by-toilet seat is very close to impossible.

Yes, there are plenty of other “bugs” lurking in public restrooms, but the good news is they rarely make people sick. Germs are no match for a healthy immune system and a thorough hand-washing. According to research done at the UA, the leading culprit is sinks. Anything with a handle (toilet, faucet, paper towel dispenser, and door) can also be a place for fecal (and other) bacteria to reside. Some bathroom-goers don’t wash their hands after using the facilities, and many more don’t wash for as long as they should (20-30 seconds).

Wash your hands well and don’t fear the toilet seat. If you want to avoid an STI during sex, use condoms or latex dams, know your partner’s STI test status, or abstain from sex. Need condoms, lube, or dental dams? Stop by Free Condom Friday at UA Campus Health, every Friday during the fall and spring semesters from 12-2pm.