



Sexually Transmitted Infections

What Everyone Should Know



AMERICAN
COLLEGE
HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are viruses, bacteria, and parasites that are transmitted through sexual activity. Anyone who is sexually active can get an STI, and STIs are very common. In fact, half of all sexually active people will get an STI by age 25—and most won't know it because there are usually no symptoms. The good news is that you can reduce your risk for STIs by practicing safer sex, and most STIs are easily discovered by getting yourself tested regularly.

Staying Healthy

The only way to guarantee that you will not get an STI is to avoid all sexual activity—this is called abstinence. However, if you choose to be sexually active, here are some tips to help you and your partner(s) stay healthy:

Talk to your partner(s). This might seem uncomfortable or awkward at first, but it's important to have a direct conversation with your partner(s) before any sexual activity. Remember that sex is most satisfying when everyone is on the same page. Here are some questions to think about:

- Do you want to use condoms or other barrier methods?
- If applicable, will a method of birth control be used?
- When were you and your partner(s) last tested?
- Do you have an STI? Have you been diagnosed with an STI in the past?
- Is there a sexual activity you do/don't want to try?
- Are you on PrEP (HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis, a medication that prevents HIV)?

Get yourself tested. Symptoms vary for each STI, but the most common symptom of an STI is having no symptom at all. So, the only way to know you have an STI is to get yourself tested—at least annually if you are sexually active. There is no single test that checks for all STIs, so make sure to talk to your health care provider about the type(s) of sex you have had (i.e., oral, vaginal, anal) so that you can be screened appropriately. Depending on your risk, you might even benefit from getting tested more frequently than once per year.

Use barriers. Barrier methods such as external and internal condoms, dental dams, and capes are very effective at preventing STIs—including HIV—when used consistently and correctly. If you have a latex allergy, then make sure to use a safer sex product that is made with nitrile, polyurethane, or polyisoprene. You can also use barrier methods with water-based or silicone-based lubricant to enhance pleasure and reduce friction that can damage the skin. Just remember not to use oil-based lubricants with latex products. Many campus health centers and community agencies provide safer sex products for free.

Type	Name	How to Test
VIRAL Not curable (except sometimes hepatitis), but treatable 	HIV	Oral swab or blood
	HPV	Pap test at 21 if you have a cervix
	Hepatitis	Blood
	Herpes	Swab of sores
BACTERIAL Curable 	Chlamydia	Urine or swab
	Gonorrhea	Urine or swab
	Syphilis	Blood
PARASITIC Curable 	Crabs	Visual examination
	Scabies	Visual examination
	Trichomoniasis	Urine or swab

Courtesy University of California, Davis Student Health & Counseling Services

Get vaccinated. HPV, hepatitis A, and hepatitis B can be prevented with vaccines. The HPV vaccine protects against the most common types of HPV that cause genital warts and cancers of the mouth, throat, cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, and anus. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the HPV vaccine through age 26 for anyone who has not yet been vaccinated.

Treating STIs

Most STIs do not go away by themselves, but effective treatment is possible in many cases. Even if your symptoms are mild (or non-existent), it is still important to talk to a health care provider (HCP) about your treatment options instead of relying on the Internet for advice and a diagnosis.

Your treatment will be most effective if you:

- Follow all instructions from your HCP.
- Avoid sexual contact until you have completed the entire treatment—even if your symptoms disappear before treatment is finished. You might even need to avoid sexual contact beyond the treatment period, so stick to your HCP's recommendations.
- Notify your sexual partner(s) so that they can be treated. With many STIs, partners should be treated at the same time to guard against reinfection.

STIs Are Common: You Are Not Alone!

If testing confirms that you have an STI, you might feel shocked, isolated, embarrassed, or ashamed. Remember, though, that having an STI does not make you any less awesome than you already are. You are normal, as most sexually active people will get an STI at some point in their lives.

While you take some time to process your diagnosis, be gentle with yourself and practice self-care. You might consider telling a trusted friend or family member or speaking to a mental health professional.

Use the resources in this brochure for more information or to find support.



For More Information

CDC Information

(800) CDC-INFO

(800) 232-4636 (In English en Español)

TTY: (888) 232-6348

www.cdc.gov/std

Search for STI testing locations:

gettested.cdc.gov

American College Health Association

(410) 859-1500 | www.acha.org

© Copyright May 2019.

This brochure is for informational purposes only and is not meant to replace consultation with your health care provider. The information in this brochure does not constitute medical advice and should not be the basis for any diagnosis or treatment.