

## Staying Healthy and Preventing STDs

STDs are diseases that are passed from one person to another through sexual contact. These include chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital herpes, human papillomavirus (HPV), syphilis, and HIV. Many of these STDs do not show symptoms for a long time. Even without symptoms, they can still be harmful and passed on during sex. You can get an STD by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has an STD. Anyone who is sexually active can get an STD and some STDs, like herpes and HPV, are spread by skin-to-skin contact. (cdc.gov)

STDs are common, especially among young people. There were 26 million new sexually transmitted infections in 2018 in the United States. About half of these infections are in people between the ages of 15 to 24. Young people are at greater risk of getting an STD for several reasons:

- Young women's bodies are biologically more prone to STDs.
- Some young people do not get the recommended STD tests.
- Many young people are hesitant to talk openly and honestly with a doctor or nurse about their sex lives.
- Not having insurance or transportation can make it more difficult for young people to access STD testing.
- Some young people have more than one sex partner. (cdc.gov)

The surest way to protect yourself against STDs is to not have sex. That means not having any vaginal, anal, or oral sex ("abstinence").

- If you do decide to have sex, you and your partner should get tested for STDs beforehand. Make sure that you and your partner use a condom from start to finish every time you have oral, anal, or vaginal sex. Know where to get condoms and how to use them correctly. It is not safe to stop using condoms unless you've both been tested for STDs, know your results, and are in a mutually monogamous relationship.
- Before you have sex, talk with your partner about how you will prevent STDs and pregnancy. If you think you are ready to have sex, you need to be ready to protect your body. You should also talk to your partner ahead of time about what you will and will not do sexually. Your partner should always respect your right to say no to anything that does not feel right.
- Make sure you get the health care you need. Ask a doctor or nurse about STD testing and about vaccines against HPV and hepatitis B.
- Girls and young women may have extra needs to protect their reproductive health. Talk to your doctor or nurse about regular cervical cancer screening, and chlamydia and gonorrhea testing. You may also want to discuss unintended pregnancy and birth control.

- Avoid mixing alcohol and/or recreational drugs with sex. If you use alcohol and drugs, you are more likely to take risks, like not using a condom or having sex with someone you normally would not have sex with. (cdc.gov)

Your doctor can prescribe medicine to cure some STDs, like chlamydia and gonorrhea. Other STDs, like herpes, cannot be cured, but you can take medicine to help with the symptoms. If you are ever treated for an STD, be sure to finish all your medicine, even if you feel better before you finish it all. Ask the doctor or nurse about testing and treatment for your partner, too. You and your partner should avoid having sex until you've both been treated. Otherwise, you may continue to pass the STD back and forth. It is possible to get an STD again (after you have been treated), if you have sex with someone who has an STD. Some curable STDs can be dangerous if they are not treated. For example, if left untreated, chlamydia and gonorrhea can make it difficult—or even impossible—for a woman to get pregnant. You also increase your chances of getting HIV if you have an untreated STD. Some STDs, like HIV, can be fatal if left untreated. (cdc.gov)

If you are living with an STD, it is important to tell your partner before you have sex. Although it may be uncomfortable to talk about your STD, open and honest conversation can help your partner make informed decisions to protect his or her health. It is also important to talk honestly with a doctor or nurse. Ask which STD tests and vaccines they recommend for you. (cdc.gov)

Many STDs do not cause any symptoms that you would notice. The only way to know for sure if you have an STD is to get tested. You can get an STD from having sex with someone who has no symptoms. Just like you, that person might not even know he or she has an STD. There are places that offer teen-friendly, confidential, and free STD tests. This means that no one must find out you have been tested. Visit [GetTested](#) to find an STD testing location near you. (cdc.gov)

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