



# What You Need to Know



Sexually Transmitted  
Infections (STIs)



### What are STIs?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are diseases that spread through sexual contact. If you have sex with someone who has an STI, you can get it too. STIs are among the most common diseases in the United States.

### About one in three Americans has an STI.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says there are almost 20 million new STIs in the U.S. each year. About 50% of these are in young people ages 15 to 24 years. If we add new infections to the existing ones, the number of people with an STI is more than 110 million.

## How do you get STIs?

You can get an STI by having vaginal, oral, or anal sex with an infected person. Sometimes you can get an STI just from contact with the penis, vagina, or anus. You don't even have to have sexual intercourse. You can also get some STIs, such as HIV and hepatitis B and C, from sharing dirty needles. STIs can spread from man to woman, woman to man, man to man, and woman to woman.

It's hard to tell who has an STI because many people who are infected look and feel healthy. They may not even know they have an infection. But they can still pass the STI to you.

## How do you prevent STIs?

The surest way to prevent STIs is not to have sex. There are many ways to show love and feel good without having sex.



All photographs are for illustrative purposes only.

### How can I make sex safer?

- **Before** you have sex, talk with your partner. Agree to use condoms.
- **Use** a condom every time you have vaginal sex, oral sex, or anal sex. Male and female condoms are now available. Learn how to use a condom correctly.
- **Be prepared.** Both men and women should carry condoms.
- **Don't use** lotions, creams, or Vaseline® with latex condoms. The oil in these products can weaken the condom. Use water-based lubricants such as K-Y Jelly® or Astroglide®.
- **Spermicides** with N-9 are not effective in preventing STIs, including HIV. N-9 may increase your risk for infection with HIV. Using spermicides is not recommended.
- **Know** that you are more likely to get an STI if you have more than one partner.
- **Get tested** for STIs if you or your partner have had multiple partners.
- **Vaccinate** to protect against HPV, hepatitis A, and hepatitis B infections.

### Do STIs cause special problems in women?

Yes. Many STIs show no signs or symptoms in women. Women may be infected in places where symptoms are not easily seen. One STI, HPV, is very common and generally clears up on its own. In some cases, however, it can lead to cervical cancer. Other untreated STIs can cause problem pregnancies or even prevent a woman from getting pregnant. Often a woman has no idea that she has an STI until the infection has caused lasting damage.

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STIs can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy or at birth. However, early treatment can often protect the baby from illness or death.

## What are the symptoms of STIs?

Most people who have an STI have no symptoms.

Getting tested may be the only sure way to tell if you have an STI. You can be tested by going to your healthcare provider or a local health clinic.

If you do have symptoms, they may appear right away, or they might not show up for weeks or even months. They might come and go. Even if the symptoms disappear, the disease may still be active.

Here are some signs or symptoms that may mean you have an STI:

### **Possible symptoms for women:**

- Sores, bumps, or blisters near your genitals, anus, or mouth
- Burning or pain when you urinate
- Itching, a bad smell, or unusual discharge from your vagina or anus
- Pain in your lower belly
- Bleeding from your vagina when you don't have your period

### **Possible symptoms for men:**

- Sores, bumps, or blisters near your genitals, anus, or mouth
- Burning or pain when you urinate
- Drip or discharge from your penis
- Itching, pain, or discharge from your anus



### What about treatments?

Many STIs can be cured by taking medicine to kill the germ that causes the infection. Some STIs cannot be cured, but treatment can relieve the symptoms and may prevent damage to your body.

- **Don't** have sex until all partners have finished their treatment.
- **Take all** your medicine, even if you start to feel better or symptoms go away.
- **Never take** medicine that's not yours; never give yours to someone else.
- **Return** to the clinic for more tests if you are told to do so.
- **Tell** anyone you have had sex with that they might have an STI and need to be tested. Your local health department can help you with this.
- **Talk** to your doctor or nurse about getting vaccinated for hepatitis B.

## What if I think I have an STI?

Get help from your healthcare provider or clinic right away. Early treatment can prevent lasting damage to your body.

## Some Common STIs

STI	Estimated New Cases Each Year
HPV	14.1 million
Chlamydia	2.9 million
Trichomoniasis (“trich”)	1.1 million
Gonorrhea	820,000
HSV-2	776,000
Syphilis	55,400
HIV	41,400
HBV	19,000

National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2013.



### Common STIs

#### HPV (Human Papillomavirus)

- The most common STI
- Caused by a virus, 90% of HPV infections go away on their own, causing no harm

**Side effects:** Can cause genital warts and cervical cancer (causes 99% of cervical cancers)

**CDC recommendation:** All boys and girls should be vaccinated, preferably before they have sex

#### Chlamydia

- Common and easy to cure
- Most people with chlamydia do not have symptoms

**Side effects:** Can cause long-term abdominal and pelvic pain, abnormal pregnancy, or infertility (not able to get pregnant)

**CDC screening recommendation:** Annual screening for all sexually active women age 25 and under, and older women with new or multiple sex partners. Screening at least once a year for all sexually active gay men, bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men (MSM), and screening for all pregnant women

#### Trichomoniasis

- Common and easy to cure
- As with many other STIs, people who have been treated for trichomoniasis can get it again

**Side effects:** Can cause pregnant women to deliver premature, low birth weight babies

**CDC screening recommendation:** Consider screening women at high risk; annual screening for all HIV-infected women

#### Gonorrhea

- As with other STIs, anyone who is sexually active can get gonorrhea
- This curable bacterial infection often has no symptoms

**Side effects:** Can cause long-term abdominal and pelvic pain, abnormal pregnancy, or infertility (not able to get pregnant)

**CDC screening recommendation:** Screen all sexually active women who have risk factors; screen sexually active men who have sex with men (MSM); and screen people with HIV infection at least annually

## HSV (Herpes Simplex Virus)

- A lifelong viral infection without a cure; medication is available to treat symptoms
- Using a condom doesn't entirely prevent herpes, but can reduce transmission

**Side effects:** Painful sores that may show up as blisters; can cause miscarriage or premature birth, and fatal infection in newborns

**CDC screening recommendation:** Testing recommended for people who have symptoms or have a sexual partner with symptoms. Also recommended for those who want full STI screening, especially if they have multiple sexual partners

## Syphilis

- Bacterial infection easily cured in its early stages
- Symptoms include painless sores on genitals, anus, or mouth or a rash on the palms or soles of the feet

**Side effects:** Can cause blindness, paralysis, and dementia after years of infection; pregnant women with syphilis can pass the disease to their unborn babies, causing death or serious problems for the babies

**CDC screening recommendation:** Screening at least once a year for all sexually active gay men, bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) and screening for all pregnant women

## HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

- A lifelong infection; medication available to help reduce amount of virus in the body and ward off symptoms
- Many people with HIV infections do not have any symptoms at all in early stages

**Side effects:** Can damage a person's immune system, leading to infections, weight loss, cancer, and, if untreated, to premature death

**CDC screening recommendation:** Screen all adults and teens ages 15 to 65 years at least once. Screen people at risk annually. Screening at least once a year for all sexually active gay men, bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men (MSM), and screening for all pregnant women

## HBV (Hepatitis B)

- Can be a lifelong infection in some people (<10%); medication available to help limit liver damage
- Most people do not know they're infected

**Side effects:** Can cause liver cancer, acute liver failure, and premature death

**CDC screening recommendation:** Screen all pregnant women; vaccine available for all unvaccinated people (infancy through adulthood)

### Where you can get help?

If you think you've been exposed to an STI, talk to your healthcare provider or call the STI clinic run by your health department.

#### **CDC Information Service**

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)

24 hours a day, every day

You can call the CDC Information Service (1-800-232-4636) to learn more about testing and get the name of a test site near you. The call is free, and no one will ask your name.

#### **American Social Health Association (ASHA)**

Toll free at 1-888-STD-AIDS (1-888-783-2437)

24 hours a day, every day

The American Social Health Association (ASHA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the health of individuals, families, and communities, with a focus on preventing sexually transmitted infections. ASHA publishes a line of award-winning educational materials and provides interactive health communications through call centers and Web sites. ASHA also conducts research and leads advocacy efforts for proper attention and funding to STD research and programs.

#### **Visit these Web sites:**

[QuestDiagnostics.com/library](http://QuestDiagnostics.com/library)

[ashastd.org](http://ashastd.org)

[iwannaknow.org](http://iwannaknow.org) (for teens)

[quierosaber.org](http://quierosaber.org) (en español)

[cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)

**For more information, visit  
[QuestDiagnostics.com/library](http://QuestDiagnostics.com/library)**

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## What tools from Quest Diagnostics are available to help manage my health?

Managing your health information has never been easier. Appointments can be scheduled at [QuestDiagnostics.com/appointment](https://QuestDiagnostics.com/appointment). Log on to find the nearest locations and available appointment times. Then select the one that's most convenient for you.

Quest Diagnostics offers these tools for your convenience:

Our Mobile Health App\* puts you in control of your health information. See, store, and share your health information on your smartphone.

Quest Diagnostics Appointment Scheduling allows you to see all available appointments at the nearest locations and select the one that's best for you.

\* Patients who reside in the following states or territories require physician authorization in order to receive their lab results via our mobile health app: CA, CT, FL, GA, HI, KY, ME, MA, NY, TN, VA, WY and PR.



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