

Spotlight on Health

Testing for Common, Curable Sexually Transmitted Infections

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a major health concern. They are caused by germs that are passed between people during sex. Anyone can get an STI, but young people (15-24 years) and men who have sex with other men have a higher chance.¹ Sex can mean vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

STIs are more common than most people think. In the United States, about 20 million new STIs happen every year.^{1,2} Some common, curable STIs are:

- Chlamydia: 1.5 million people got chlamydia in 2015²
- Gonorrhea: 395,000 people got gonorrhea in 2015²
- Trichomoniasis: 3.7 million people have trichomoniasis, and about 1.1 million people get the infection each year³

Why Testing Matters

- Testing matters because these STIs can be treated easily and inexpensively. And curing them can prevent more problems for you and your loved ones.
- Although STIs can cause symptoms (see sidebar), they often do not. So you or your sex partner could have an STI and not even know.⁵ This means it is easy to give an STI to someone you have sex with, and easy to catch one from someone you have sex with.
- Women may not find out they have an STI until problems like pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) occur.³ PID can cause infertility (not being able to get pregnant). It can also cause ectopic pregnancy (when a fertilized egg starts growing outside the womb).
- Pregnant women can give STIs to their babies. This can cause babies to be born too early or have problems in their eyes or lungs after being born.³
- If you have one STI, it is easier to catch another.⁶

The good news is that these STIs are easy to treat.³ So even if you don't think you have an STI, you should find out if you or the people you have sex with have an STI. It is important for keeping your body healthy, as well as not giving an STI to your sex partner(s).^{3,5}



Risk Factors for Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Trichomoniasis

Some people are more likely to catch these and other STIs. Your healthcare provider (HCP) can help you understand your risk and whether you should be tested. To help decide, they may ask about your age, sex, sexual activity, and whether you are pregnant, among other questions.

In addition, you may be at risk, or higher risk, if^{3,8}:

- You have a new sex partner, or you or your partner has more than 1 partner.
- You or your sex partner has (or had) an STI.
- You do not use condoms, or you use them incorrectly or not all the time.
- You've been involved in sexual situations where drugs or money are involved.

How Your Healthcare Provider Can Help

Your HCP or clinician may³:

- Ask you about your sexual history to see if you are at risk for an STI
- Teach you about safer sex practices/choices
- Test you for STIs if you have symptoms, are more likely to catch one, or are pregnant
- Provide treatment if you have an STI
- Help you get your sex partner(s) tested and treated if you do have an STI
- Make sure your STI is gone or hasn't come back after treatment

How You Can Help

If you are sexually active, you can help find and treat STIs by working with your HCP and the people you have sex with:

- Be open and honest with your HCP about your sexual history.
- Ask your HCP if you should be tested for STIs, even if you feel fine—so you know for sure.
- Ask your partner to get tested for STIs.
- If you think you may have been exposed to an STI or have an STI, see your HCP as soon as you can and ask to be tested.
- If you do have an STI, be sure to let your partner know so they can be tested.
- If you or your partner has an STI, be sure to complete treatment as told and go back for repeat testing at 3 months.
- Keep yourself safer from STIs by having safer sex (for example, use condoms all the time, every time; decide with your partner to only have sex with each other; have sex with fewer people).

If you do not want to talk to your HCP about STIs or don't have a regular HCP, many STI clinics provide confidential and low-cost testing. You can visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *Get Tested* search site at: gettested.cdc.gov/search_results.

How the Laboratory Can Help

Quest Diagnostics offers many tests to detect chlamydia, gonorrhea, and trichomoniasis in men and women. These options include the CDC-recommended nucleic acid amplification tests (NAATs). NAATs are easy, fast, and accurate. You can usually get your results in a few days. NAATs can often be done with a urine or vaginal swab sample that you collect yourself at your doctor's office or health clinic.⁶

Symptoms of STIs

If you or the person you have sex with has any of these symptoms, talk to your HCP about testing³⁻⁵:

- Painful, cloudy, or increased urination
- Sores on the penis or vagina
- Unusual discharge from the vagina or penis, or bleeding between periods
- Abdominal/pelvic pain (women)
- Pain and swelling in one testicle
- Rectal pain, discharge, itching, or bleeding

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance: STDs 2015*. Atlanta, GA: CDC ; 2016. cdc.gov/std/stats15/std-surveillance-2015-print.pdf.
2. CDC Fact Sheet: Reported STDs in the United States. 2015 National Data for Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Syphilis. cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/docs/factsheets/std-trends-508.pdf.
3. Workowski KA, Bolan GA; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sexually transmitted diseases treatment guidelines, 2015. *MMWR Recomm Rep*. 2015;64(RR-03):1-137.
4. Gonorrhea - CDC Fact Sheet. cdc.gov/std/gonorrhea/stdfact-gonorrhea-detailed.htm. Updated October 28, 2016. Accessed March 21, 2017.
5. Chlamydia - CDC Fact Sheet. cdc.gov/std/chlamydia/stdfact-chlamydia-detailed.htm. Updated October 17, 2016. Accessed March 21, 2017.
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Recommendations for the laboratory-based detection of *Chlamydia trachomatis* and *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*—2014. *MMWR Recomm Rep*. 2014;63(RR-02):1-19.