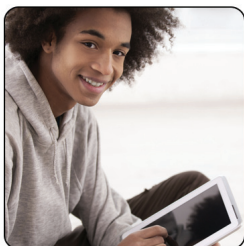


Information for Teens: Staying Healthy and Preventing STDs



If you choose to have sex, know how to protect yourself against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).



What are sexually transmitted diseases (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, but they can still be harmful and passed on during sex.

How are STDs spread?

You can get an STD by having sex (vaginal, anal or oral) with someone who has an STD. Anyone who is sexually active can get an STD. You don't even have to "go all the way" (have anal or vaginal sex) to get an STD, since some STDs, like herpes and HPV, are spread by skin-to-skin contact.

How common are STDs?

STDs are common, especially among young people. There are about 20 million new cases of STDs each year in the United States, and about half of these are in people between the ages of 15 and 24. Young people are at greater risk of getting an STD for several reasons:

- Young women's bodies are biologically more susceptible 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.

What can I do to protect myself?

- The surest way to protect yourself against STDs is to not have sex. That means not having any vaginal, anal, or oral sex ("abstinence"). There are many things to consider before having sex, and it's okay to say "no" if you don't want to have sex.
- If you do decide to have sex, you and your partner should get tested beforehand and make sure that you and your partner use a condom—every time you have oral, anal, or vaginal sex, from start to finish. 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, know your status, and are in a mutually monogamous relationship.
- Mutual monogamy means that you and your partner both agree to only have sexual contact with each other. This can help protect against STDs, as long as you've both been tested and know you're STD-free.
- Before you have sex, talk with your partner about how you will prevent STDs and pregnancy. If you think you're ready to have sex, you need to be ready to protect your body and your future. 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 doesn't feel right.

