



Health Professionals  
Committed to the  
Reproductive Needs of  
Children and Adolescents

## Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

### What are Sexually Transmitted Infections?

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), sometimes known as Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), are bacteria, viruses and parasites that are spread through sexual activity. Types of STIs include: chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomonas, HIV/AIDS, syphilis, herpes, human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis B, pubic lice and others. Just like the name says, sexually transmitted infections are passed from person to person during sex, so if you don't have sex, you are not at risk. Any type of sexual activity puts you at risk for a sexually transmitted infection.

### What happens if I get an STI?

If you get an STI, it can to your partner. Some STIs, such as gonorrhea and chlamydia, can cause serious internal infections, leading to chronic lower abdominal pain and difficulty with pregnancies. Some STIs cause cancer: hepatitis can cause liver cancer, and HPV can cause cervical, vaginal, anal and throat cancer. While medications can control HIV, it cannot be cured. It causes many other health problems and may lead to death.

### How do people get STIs?

Some STIs are spread through contact with infected skin and some are spread through infected body fluids (like blood, semen or vaginal fluid). Vaginal, oral and anal sex can spread STIs. STI's can occur in both the straight and LGBTQ community.

### Are STIs treatable?

Some STIs can be cured with medications, like antibiotics. However, some other STIs (like herpes and HIV) cannot be cured but can be treated with special medicines that may need to be taken life-long.

### What are symptoms of an STI?

STIs can cause a variety of symptoms but many people with an STI **do not** have symptoms. For example, 70% of girls infected with chlamydia have no symptoms. Symptoms can include a rash or sores around genitals or mouth, lower abdomen pain, pain with urination or sex, vaginal or penile discharge, itching, swelling or bleeding from the vagina or penis.

### How can I prevent STIs?

- If you are having sex, it is important to use condoms or other barriers (like dental dams for oral sex) 100% of the time for the entire time.
- A good way to introduce condoms is to say to your partner: "Let's use protection. Using a condom is something I do for myself to stay safe every time."
- Remember that using birth control (such as the pill) alone does not protect against the spread of STIs.
- Having an exclusive relationship where you and a partner only have sex with each other can decrease your risk of getting an STI. It is safest to still use a condom every time you have sex with any partner until you are on your honeymoon.
- Make sure you and your partner get checked regularly for STIs, ideally before you have sex with each other.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs, which can increase risky behaviors and condom malfunctions.
- Keeping your vaccines up-to-date can help prevent some STIs, like HPV and hepatitis B.