

Ways to protect against STDs/STIs

Start With a Conversation

Before you begin sexual contact with any partner, it's good practice to discuss sexual health. It's completely reasonable to ask your partner(s) about the last time they got tested, or if they've been experiencing any worrying symptoms lately. This talk doesn't just have to focus on STIs/STDs, you can also ask about COVID or any other health concerns.

Get Tested

It's a good rule of thumb to get tested between each new partner(s) to ensure that you're healthy. There are lots of free options for tests that we'll touch on later in the brochure. If you have a long term partner, you should still get tested at least once a year, because STIs/STDs can be transmitted during non-sexual contact as well.

Use Protection

Although condoms cannot prevent the spread of orally transmitted STIs/STDs, they can greatly reduce the risk of contracting an STI/STD that is spread through vaginal fluid, semen, or blood. Internal and external condoms along with Dental Dams offer protection while having sex.

Listen to Your Body

If you feel unwell after having intercourse, seek medical help. You can get tested or have a checkup by a nurse or doctor. Catching STIs/STDs early helps to prevent long term side effects.

Testing, Treatment, and Combating Stigma

Testing

Health Services performs STD tests through the Knox County Health Department. They collect urine to test for gonorrhea and chlamydia and blood to test for HIV and syphilis. These tests are free and can be collected on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Friday mornings.

Treatment

Antibiotics are also available at Health Services, if someone tests positive or has a known exposure (partner treatment). More serious treatments or vaccinations can be acquired at a doctor's office or at Family Planning.

Combating Stigma

Stigmas surrounding STI/STD contraction and transmission are a leading cause of untreated/undiagnosed STIs/STDs. Untreated STDs can cause cancer, infertility, and in serious cases, death. The sad fact is that most STDs are curable or treatable when caught early on. Contracting an STI is a natural part of being sexually active, just like catching a common cold. When discussing sexual health, try to keep an open mind and shut down stigmas or generalizations when you hear them. In this small way, we can combat stigmas and save lives.

The Down and Dirty About STIs/STDs

Keep yourself and your partner(s) safe.

So... What are STDs and STIs?

STIs and **STDs** are contracted in the same way, however they are significantly different.

STI - a sexually transmitted infection. This term is used to reference when the possible pathogen has been initially transferred into the host.

STD - a sexually transmitted disease, occurs as a result of the initial STI. However, STIs do not always cause STDs.

Transmission - STDs and STIs can be transmitted through bodily fluid. This includes semen, vaginal fluid, blood, or saliva. Transmission most commonly occurs during sexual acts, but it's important to note that some STIs can be transferred during other activities, like sharing a beverage.

End the Stigma

Just like the common cold and the stomach flu, STIs/STDs are a normal risk of sexual intercourse. In fact, the CDC estimates that 1 in 5 Americans, at any given time, have an STD. Most STIs/STDs are easily treatable once diagnosed. The true danger of STIs/STDs is when they go untreated, and this unfortunately happens a lot due to negative stigma around getting testing or treatment.

Common STDs/STIs and their treatments

Chlamydia - a bacterial infection that can be treated with antibiotics. In people with penises it can cause burning when you urinate and infection of the long, tightly coiled tube that lies behind each testicle and collects sperm (epididymis). In people with vaginas it can cause infection of the cervix and pelvis.

Genital Herpes - spread through sexual contact. They can cause skin blisters and sores in genital areas. Some people may have only a single outbreak of herpes. Other people will have repeated outbreaks.

HPV - skin growths on or around the genitals or anus. They are caused by a virus that's spread by sexual contact. Genital warts may continue to grow and spread, or they may go away with or without treatment. They often come back after treatment.

Gonorrhea - a bacterial infection spread through sexual contact. It is commonly found in the genital area, but can also infect other parts of the body like the rectum or throat. People with penises may experience discharge from the penis and in people with vaginas it can cause a severe pelvic infection. Gonorrhea can also cause a type of arthritis. However, it is not always symptomatic.

Hepatitis B - A virus that infects the liver. It spreads through the blood of an infected person or through sexual contact with an infected person. Hepatitis B Most adults who get it have it for a short time and then get better. Sometimes the virus causes a long-term infection, which can lead to liver damage or liver cancer.

Syphilis - an infection spread through sex. The most common symptom is a painless sore on the genitals, rectal area, or mouth. Other symptoms may include rash, hair loss, and flu-like symptoms. The infection is still there and can spread if it isn't treated. Antibiotics can treat syphilis and help prevent serious health problems, like problems with the heart or brain.

Trichomoniasis - an infection caused by a parasite which spreads through sexual contact. People with vagina are more likely to have symptoms than men. The infection can cause a discharge from the vagina that smells bad. The infection can be treated with antibiotics.

HIV - is a sexually contracted virus which can lead to AIDS. Having other STIs can also increase your chances of contracting HIV.