

Prevention (pregnancy) vs. Protection (STIs)

No one wants to get a sexually transmitted infection, STI, just as no one wants to get the flu or any other kind of infection. Lots of people get STIs at some point in their lives. It's actually really common, especially in young people. That's why it is important to learn important things about STIs.

Some STIs can be cured; others can be treated but stay in your body for life. Others can be fought off by your body's immune system and go away on their own. Some can affect fertility (whether or not you can get pregnant or get someone else pregnant) some can affect sexual functioning. If left untreated, some can cause death.

If you're going to be in a sexual relationship in the future you will want to know how to keep yourself and others safe.

Anyone who has sexual contact with another person can get an STI. This is true regardless of if you are a man or woman, your religion, ethnic backgrounds, how much money you have, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

There is no test that can check for all STIs. When having a conversations with people you're having a sexual relationship with be specific about what tests they've had.

A doctor or provider will ask you some questions to determine which STIs you may or may not be at risk for and then conduct tests based on that. It's really important to be honest with your provider and medical team.

STI's can be spread through a few ways:

- Contact with an infected fluids (blood, semen & seminal fluid, vaginal fluid)
- Contact with infected mucus membranes (fleshy pink skin of the genitals [anus and vagina] and mouth)
- Vaginal sex
- Anal sex (higher risk because of the thin tissue of the anal canal often bleeds)
- Oral sex

There are three main types of STIs:

- Bacteria
 - Chlamydia
 - Syphilis
 - Gonorrhea
- Virus
 - HPV
 - Genital Warts
 - HIV/AIDS
 - Hepatitis A, B, and C

- Herpes
- Parasite
 - Pubic lice
 - Scabies
 - Trichomoniasis

Many STIs don't have any symptoms or take a long time to develop symptoms. Some of the more common symptoms:

- Rash
- Itchiness
- Fever
- Flu like symptoms
- Sore of infected area (mouth and genitals)
- Bumps or warts around the genitals
- Irregular discharge from the genitals

If you develop any symptoms after sexual contact (within a month of that experience) make an appointment with your provider.

These are the best ways to keep you safe and healthy. Brainstorm a few reasons why each of these might keep you safe.

Abstinence (no sexual relationships):

Using condoms or other barrier methods correctly each time you have sex and using a barrier method for oral sex (dental dam):

Getting tested for STIs (and making sure your partner does too) before you have sex together:

Limit the number of sexual partners you have:

If you were to find out that you had an STI, what could you do to make sure you don't pass it to anyone else?

Other ways to prevent STIs and other infectious diseases:

- Don't inject recreational drugs or have a sexual relationship with someone who injects recreational drugs. If you do inject drugs, do not share a needle.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs since you are more likely to engage in risky behavior while under the influence of the drugs or alcohol
- Don't douche, this can irritate the vagina which makes it easier to contract STIs
- Get your vaccines, especially HPV and Hepatitis B
- Stay healthy; drink plenty of water, get daily exercise and eat well. The healthier you are, the stronger your immune system

Some people chose to have sex, but aren't ready to have a baby. This is mainly directed at sex between a man and a woman. There are many options for pregnancy prevention (from most effective to least):

- "Not right now" Abstinence, 100% effective, protects you from STIs
- Female sterilization (permanent) 99% effective, does not protect you from STIs
- LARC (long-acting reversible contraception) 99% effective, does not protect you from STIs
 - Intrauterine Device IUD
 - Implant (matchstick size implant that goes in your arm)
- Hormonal birth control (patch, pill, vaginal ring) 91% effective, does not protect you from STIs
- Barrier method (male condom 85% effective when used correctly every time and female condom 79% effective when used correctly every time)
- Withdrawal/Pull Out Method 78% effective, does not protect you from STIs
- Fertility Awareness (only engaging in sex when least likely to get pregnant) 76-78% effective, does not protect you from STIs
- Many more! Talk to your doctor about what method is right for you

There are great resources for learning more about what options are right for you for both STI protection and pregnancy prevention:

- Bedsider.org
- <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control>