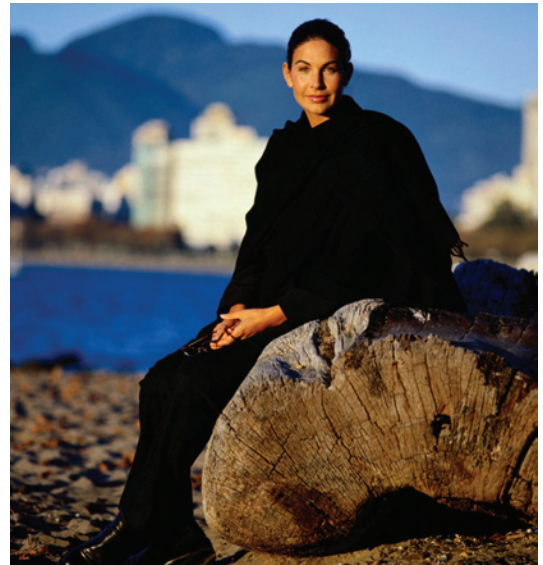


Sexually Transmitted Infections

You probably have heard of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—also called sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs. But if you are like many women, you might not know that much about how STIs could impact your health. You might not think you need to worry about STIs. Yet STIs are a major public health concern in the United States, where an estimated 19 million new infections occur each year. STIs affect people of all backgrounds and economic levels. And women have more frequent and more serious complications from STIs than men. Thankfully, most STIs are preventable. Taking a few protective steps can lower your risk of getting an STI.

What is a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?

A sexually transmitted infection (STI) is an infection you can get by having intimate sexual contact with someone who already has the infection. STIs can be caused by viruses, bacteria, and parasites. Many STIs have mild or no symptoms. So you can have an STI and not even know it. Most STIs can be found by simple tests, but routine testing is not widespread. So many cases of STIs go undiagnosed and untreated, which can lead to serious health problems—particularly for women.



One partner can expose you to many diseases. You are at risk of getting all of the STIs that your partner's past and present partners have had.



STIs are easily passed through intimate sexual contact

STIs are spread during vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex, and genital touching. It is possible to get some STIs without having intercourse. Here are some other reasons STIs spread so easily:

- You can't tell if a person has an STI by the way he or she looks.
- Talking about sex is awkward for some people. They may not bring up safe sex or STIs with their partners.
- Many STIs have no or only mild symptoms. So many people don't know that they have an STI or that they are putting their partners at risk.
- If you have unprotected sex, you may be exposed to the STIs that your partner's past and present partners have had. This is true even if you have been sexually active with only one person.
- Myths and false beliefs about STIs put people at risk of getting and passing on STIs.



TRUE statements about STIs:

- You CAN get an STI without having intercourse.
- You CANNOT get HIV from sitting on toilet seats.
- Birth control pills DO NOT protect from STIs.



STIs: Dangerous to women

Both men and women get STIs. But women have more frequent and more serious complications from STIs than men. Overall, untreated STIs can cause cancer, infertility, pregnancy problems, and other health problems in women. Women also need to be concerned about STIs for these reasons:

- Mild symptoms can be mistaken for “nothing” or something else, such as a urinary tract infection or vaginal yeast infection.
- A woman’s ability to protect herself from STIs depends on whether she is able to get her partner to use a condom. Women who don’t feel they can choose to use a condom are at greater

risk of getting STIs because they may feel forced to take part in unsafe sexual practices. This is true for women in relationships and for women who are victims of sexual assault.

- Some STIs increase a woman’s risk of getting HIV/AIDS and other STIs because they irritate the vagina. Some cause open sores. This makes it easier for semen or vaginal fluid carrying HIV or other STIs to get inside a woman’s body.
- Having prior STIs raises a woman’s risk of future STIs. The reasons for this are complex and include biological, behavioral, and social issues.
- Silent and harmful STIs, such as chlamydia, affect young women at higher rates.
- Women of color have STIs at higher rates than other women. In 2005, the rate of reported chlamydia was 7 times greater in black women and almost 5 times greater in American Indian/Alaska Native women than in white women. These differences might reflect limited access to quality health care, higher rates of poverty, and other health issues among these women.

Will I get an STI?

The answer depends on whether you take steps to reduce your risks. Keep in mind that more than half of Americans will have an STI at some point in their lifetime.

Learning more: Types of STIs

More than 25 infections are known to be passed through sexual contact. The STIs discussed here are among the most common and dangerous to women.

Types of STIs			
Bacterial vaginosis (BV)	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>BV is the most common vaginal infection in women of childbearing age. With BV, the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina is changed so that there are more “harmful” bacteria and fewer “good” bacteria. Antibiotics are used to treat and cure BV.</p>	<p>Not much is known about how women get BV. Any woman can get BV. But BV rarely occurs in women who have never had vaginal sex. Having BV can increase a woman’s risk of getting an STI, including HIV. These things put you more at risk for BV:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a new or many sex partners • Douching • Using an intrauterine device (IUD) for birth control • Not using a condom 	<p>You cannot get BV from such objects as toilet seats, bedding, or swimming pools.</p> <p>Most women have no symptoms. Women with symptoms may have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vaginal itching • Pain when urinating • Discharge with a fishy odor 	<p>Your doctor will test a sample of fluid from your vagina. Your doctor also may be able to see signs of BV, like a grayish-white discharge, during an exam.</p>
Chlamydia	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>Chlamydia is the most frequently reported STI caused by bacteria. It is a “silent” disease because 75 percent of infected women and at least half of infected men have no symptoms. Severe complications can result from untreated chlamydia. Antibiotics are used to treat and cure chlamydia.</p>	<p>Women and men can get chlamydia by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with an infected person.</p> <p>An infected mother can also pass chlamydia to her baby during childbirth.</p>	<p>Most women have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1 to 3 weeks of exposure. Symptoms, if any, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abnormal vaginal discharge • “Burning” when passing urine • Bleeding between periods • Lower abdominal pain • Low back pain • Nausea • Fever • Pain during sex 	<p>Your doctor can tell if you have chlamydia by testing your urine or by testing a swab sample taken from the infected site, such as the cervix.</p>

Types of STIs

Genital herpes	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>Genital herpes is caused by the herpes simplex viruses type 1 (HSV-1) and type 2 (HSV-2). Most genital herpes is caused by HSV-2.</p> <p>About 1 in 4 women in the United States have had HSV-2 infection.</p> <p>The virus will stay in the body forever. But outbreaks, for people who have them, tend to be less severe and occur less often over time. Also, antiviral therapy can shorten outbreaks and make them less severe, or keep them from happening.</p>	<p>Genital herpes is spread through genital-to-genital or genital-to-oral contact. It spreads most easily when an infected person has open sores. But you also can get herpes from an infected person who has no symptoms. You do not need to have intercourse to get herpes.</p> <p>You cannot get herpes from objects such as toilet seats, bathtubs, or towels.</p>	<p>Most people have mild or no symptoms. For people who have “outbreaks,” the symptoms are clear:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small red bumps, blisters, or open sores show up where the virus entered the body, such as the penis, vagina, or mouth • Vaginal discharge • Fever • Headache • Muscle aches • Pain when passing urine • Itching, burning, or swollen glands in the genital area • Pain in legs, buttocks, or genital area • Symptoms may go away and then come back. Sores heal after 2 to 4 weeks. <p>Your doctor can tell you if you have genital herpes by looking at the sores and by taking a sample from the sore for lab testing.</p>	<p>It can be hard to tell if you have herpes without symptoms. Blood tests can help detect herpes when there are no symptoms or between outbreaks.</p>

Types of STIs

Gonorrhea	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>Gonorrhea is caused by a type of bacteria that thrives in warm, moist areas of the reproductive tract. It also can grow in the mouth, throat, eyes, and anus.</p> <p>Most women who have gonorrhea have <i>no symptoms</i>. Untreated gonorrhea can lead to serious health problems.</p> <p>Antibiotics are used to cure gonorrhea. But gonorrhea has become more and more resistant to antibiotics, which means the drugs do not work as well or at all. Still, it's important to get tested and treated by a doctor.</p>	<p>You can get gonorrhea through contact with an infected vagina, penis, anus, or mouth. It is spread through semen and vaginal fluid during unprotected sexual contact with a person who has it. Touching infected sex organs, and then touching your eyes can cause an eye infection.</p> <p>An infected pregnant woman can pass gonorrhea to her baby during vaginal delivery.</p> <p>You cannot get gonorrhea from shaking hands or sitting on toilet seats.</p>	<p>Most women have <i>no symptoms</i>. When a woman does have symptoms, they most often appear within 10 days of becoming infected. Symptoms can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain or burning while passing urine • Yellowish and sometimes bloody vaginal discharge • Bleeding between periods • Pain during sex • Heavy bleeding during periods <p>These signs can be mistaken for a urinary tract infection or another vaginal infection.</p> <p>Gonorrhea that affects the anus might cause discharge, soreness, bleeding, itching, or painful bowel movements. Infections in the throat could cause a sore throat. With eye infection, symptoms may include redness, itching, or discharge from the eye.</p>	<p>Your doctor can tell if you have gonorrhea by testing your urine or by testing a swab sample taken from the infected site, such as the cervix.</p>

Types of STIs

Hepatitis B	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>Hepatitis B (HBV) is one type of viral hepatitis. With hepatitis, the liver does not work well.</p> <p>In most people, HBV gets better on its own. Long-lasting hepatitis (chronic) can lead to scarring of the liver, liver failure, and liver cancer. Chronic HBV can be suppressed with some antiviral drugs. But these drugs don't work for all people.</p> <p>Vaccines are available for hepatitis A and B.</p>	<p>HBV is spread by exposure to an infected person's blood. This can happen by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who is infected. It also can be passed from an infected mother to her baby during vaginal childbirth or through sharing needles with an infected person. You also can get HBV by sharing personal items, such as razors or toothbrushes, with an infected person.</p> <p>You cannot get hepatitis through casual contact, such as shaking hands, hugging, or kissing.</p>	<p>Some people with viral hepatitis have no signs of infection. Others might have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-grade fever • Headache • Muscle aches • Tiredness • Loss of appetite • Nausea • Vomiting • Diarrhea • Dark-colored urine and pale bowel movements • Jaundice 	<p>Your doctor can tell if you have viral hepatitis through blood tests and a medical exam.</p>

HIV/AIDS

For complete information, see the *HIV/AIDS* chapter on page 139.

Pubic lice	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>Also called "crabs," pubic lice are parasites found in the genital area on pubic hair and sometimes on other coarse body hairs. Pubic lice are common. They are different from head lice. Special shampoos and medicines are used to kill pubic lice.</p>	<p>Pubic lice usually are spread through sexual contact. Intercourse does not need to occur. Rarely, pubic lice are spread through contact with an infected person's sheets, towels, or clothes.</p> <p>Pubic lice CANNOT be spread by sitting on a toilet seat. Animals do not get or spread pubic lice.</p>	<p>Symptoms of pubic lice include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Itching in the genital area • Visible nits (lice eggs) or crawling lice (which look like crabs when viewed with a magnifying glass) 	<p>Doctors can tell if a person has pubic lice by looking closely at the pubic hair for nits or young or adult lice.</p>

Types of STIs

Human papillomavirus (HPV) and genital warts	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>There are more than 100 types of HPV, 30 of which are passed through sexual contact. The types of HPV that infect the genital area are called genital HPV.</p> <p>HPV is very common. Most sexually active people will have it at some point in their lives.</p> <p>Some types of genital HPV are “high risk,” which means they put a woman at greater risk of getting cervical cancer. “High risk” does not have to do with the risk of getting HPV. Low-risk types of HPV do not cause cervical cancer. But low-risk types of HPV may cause genital warts.</p> <p><i>There is no treatment or cure for HPV. But a new HPV vaccine protects women against some HPV types that cause cancer or warts. (See page 134 for more information.)</i></p>	<p>Genital HPV is passed by skin-to-skin and genital contact, mainly during vaginal and anal intercourse. It might also be possible to pass it during oral sex.</p>	<p>HPV usually has no symptoms.</p> <p>Both low-risk and high-risk types of HPV can cause growths on the cervix and vagina. These often are invisible.</p> <p>Low-risk types of HPV can cause genital warts. Warts can form weeks, months, or years after sexual contact with a person who has genital HPV. They can grow inside and around the outside of the vagina, on the vulva and cervix, groin, and in or around the anus. Warts can be raised or flat, alone or in groups, small or large, and sometimes they are shaped like a cauliflower.</p> <p>High-risk types of HPV may cause cervical changes that, if not treated, may progress into cervical cancer.</p>	<p>A Pap test can find changes on the cervix that are caused by HPV infection. Women who have had the HPV vaccine still need to have a regular Pap test.</p> <p>An HPV test, which is a DNA test that detects high-risk types of HPV, may be done for women who are older than 30 or for women who are younger than 30 who have abnormal Pap test results. An abnormal Pap test result does not mean for sure that a woman has HPV or cervical cancer. Follow-up tests are needed to confirm any diagnosis.</p> <p>Having genital warts is another way a doctor can tell if a person has an HPV infection.</p>

Types of STIs

Syphilis	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>Syphilis is caused by a type of bacteria. It progresses in stages. Without treatment, the infection will continue to progress, possibly leading to death.</p> <p>Syphilis can be cured with an antibiotic. Penicillin is the preferred drug to treat syphilis at all stages. Doctors can use other medicines for people who cannot take penicillin.</p>	<p>Syphilis is spread during vaginal, anal, or oral sex through contact with an open sore or contact with a skin rash of an infected person. The bacteria can enter the body through the penis, anus, vagina, mouth, or through broken skin. It can be spread during the first two stages of the disease.</p> <p>An infected pregnant woman also can pass syphilis to her baby during pregnancy and childbirth.</p> <p>Syphilis is not spread by contact with toilet seats, doorknobs, swimming pools, hot tubs, bathtubs, shared clothing, or shared food and drinks.</p>	<p>In the primary stage, a single, painless sore appears about 10 to 90 days after infection. It can appear in the genital area, tongue, lips, or other parts of the body. The sore will heal with or without treatment.</p> <p>The secondary stage starts 3 to 6 weeks after the sore appears. Symptoms can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin rash with rough, red or reddish-brown spots both on the hands and feet that usually does not itch and clears on its own • Fever • Sore throat and swollen glands • Patchy hair loss • Headaches and muscle aches • Weight loss • Tiredness <p>In the latent stage, symptoms go away, but can come back. When symptoms come back, the infection can be passed to others. People without treatment may or may not move to the late stage.</p> <p>In the late stage, the infection spreads and can cause damage throughout the body. Some people may die.</p>	<p>A doctor can tell if a person has syphilis in a number of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing the signs and symptoms and confirming with tests • Looking at the fluid from a sore or swollen lymph node under a microscope • Testing the patient's blood in the lab

Types of STIs

Trichomoniasis	How you get it	Symptoms	How to find out if you have it
<p>This infection, also called “trich,” is caused by a parasite. It usually is passed through sexual contact. But it also can be picked up from contact with damp, moist objects.</p> <p>Antibiotics are used to treat and cure trichomoniasis.</p>	<p>The parasite can be passed through penis-in-vagina intercourse or vulva-to-vulva contact with an infected partner. Women can get the disease from infected men or women.</p> <p>It also can be passed if the genital area comes in contact with damp towels, wet clothing, toilet seats, or other moist objects where the parasites are present.</p>	<p>Many women do not have symptoms. Symptoms, which usually appear 5 to 28 days after exposure, can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellow, green, or gray vaginal discharge (often foamy) with a strong odor • Discomfort during sex or when passing urine • Itching and discomfort in the genital area • Lower stomach pain (rarely) 	<p>A doctor will do a pelvic exam and lab test to tell if a person has trichomoniasis. The doctor sometimes can see small, red sores inside the vagina or on the cervix. The doctor also will take a fluid sample from the vagina and look for the parasite under a microscope or send the sample to a lab for testing, or use other lab tests.</p>

If you have any symptoms of an STI, stop having sex and contact your doctor right away.

Treating STIs

The treatment depends on the type of STI. For some STIs, treatment may involve using medicine or getting a shot. For STIs that cannot be cured, like genital herpes, treatment can ease symptoms. During treatment, follow all of your doctor’s orders and avoid sex during treatment or an outbreak. And be sure to finish all the medicine your doctor gives you, even if your symptoms go away. With most STIs, your sexual partner(s) should be treated, too. This can keep you from getting the STI again or your partner from passing it to other people. Remember, the sooner an STI is found, the easier it is to treat and the less likely you will have health complications.

How untreated STIs can affect your health

You might be too shy to talk to your doctor about your risk of STIs or any symptoms you might be having. But not talking to your doctor could be far worse than any embarrassment you might feel. Untreated STIs can cause severe health problems for women, such as pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, ectopic pregnancy, widespread infection to other parts of the body, cancer, organ damage, and even death.

STIs and pregnancy

STIs can cause many of the same health problems for pregnant women as for women who are not pregnant. Moreover, STIs during pregnancy can cause early labor, cause the water to break early, and cause infection in the uterus after the birth. STIs also can cause problems for the unborn baby. Some STIs can cross the placenta and infect the baby while

What is pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)?

Pelvic inflammatory disease, or PID, is a broad term used to describe an infection of a woman's pelvic organs. Many types of bacteria can cause PID. Often, PID is a complication of untreated STIs—mainly chlamydia and gonorrhea. Damage from PID can cause a woman to become infertile (not able to become pregnant). In fact, about 1 in every 5 women with PID becomes infertile. PID also can cause chronic pelvic pain and ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy in the fallopian tube, which can be life threatening). It can be hard to tell if a woman has PID because there are no specific tests for PID and she might have mild or no symptoms. Women who have symptoms might have:

- pain in the lower belly area
- fever
- unusual vaginal discharge, which may smell bad
- pain during sex
- bleeding between periods
- pain during pelvic exam

A doctor will ask about symptoms and can perform a pelvic exam and tests to tell if a woman has PID. Once found, PID can be cured with antibiotics. But any damage already done to a woman's reproductive organs before treatment cannot be reversed. So early treatment of PID is important. A woman should see her doctor right away if she thinks she might have an STI or PID.

it is in the uterus. Others can be passed from a pregnant woman to the baby during delivery. The harmful effects to babies range from low birth weight, to chronic liver disease, to stillbirth. Some of these problems can be prevented if the mother has routine prenatal care, which includes screening tests for STIs at various points during the pregnancy. Other problems can be treated if the infection is found at birth or within a few days after birth.

STIs and breastfeeding mothers

Some STIs can be passed to your baby through breastfeeding. And some medi-

cines used to treat STIs can pass to your baby through your breast milk. Talk to your doctor about whether you should breastfeed if you have an STI. (See page 199 of the *Breastfeeding* chapter for more information.)

How to protect yourself from STIs

Even though STIs pass easily from person to person, there are steps you can take to lower your risk of getting an STI. The following steps work best when used together—no single strategy can protect you from every single type of STI.

- **Don't have sex.** The surest way to avoid getting any STI is to practice abstinence, which means not having vaginal, oral, or anal sex. Keep in mind that some STIs, such as genital herpes, can be spread without having intercourse.
- **Be faithful.** Having sex with one uninfected partner who only has sex with you will keep you safe from STIs. Both partners must be faithful *all the time* to avoid STI exposure. This means that you have sex only with each other and no one else. The fewer sex partners you have, the lower your risk of being exposed to an STI.
- **Use condoms correctly and EVERY time you have sex.** Use condoms for all types of sexual contact, even if penetration does not take place. Condoms work by keeping blood, a man's semen, and a woman's vaginal fluid—all of which can carry STIs—from passing from one person to another. Use protection from the very beginning to

How to Use Condoms Correctly

Both male and female condoms are highly protective when used correctly. But don't use them both at the same time! They do not stay in place when used together. Read the instructions and practice a few times before using condoms for the first time. Also, follow these guidelines:

Male condom

Use male condoms made of latex, or polyurethane if you or your partner is allergic to latex. "Natural" or "lambskin" condoms don't protect against STIs. Use male condoms for vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

- Keep male condoms in a cool, dry place. Storing condoms where it can get hot, such as in the car or your wallet, can cause them to break or tear.
- Check the wrapper for tears and to make sure the condom is not too old to use. Carefully open the wrapper—don't use your teeth or fingernails. Make sure the condom looks okay to use. Don't use a condom that's gummy, brittle, discolored, or has even a tiny hole.
- Put on the condom as soon as the penis is erect, but before it touches the vagina, mouth, or anus.
- Use only lubricants made with water (such as, K-Y Jelly™, Astroglide™, AquaLube™, glycerine). Oil-based lubricants, such as Vaseline™, can weaken the condom. The lubricant is put on the outside of the condom. It helps to keep the condom from tearing. Don't regularly use lubricants with spermicide called nonoxynol-9 (N-9), which might make it easier for an STI—including HIV—to get into your body.



the very end of each sex act, and with every sex partner. And be prepared: Don't rely on your partner to have protection.

- **Know that certain birth control methods—and other methods—don't protect against STIs.** Birth control methods including the pill, shots, implants, intrauterine devices (IUDs), diaphragms, and spermicides will not protect you from STIs. They only can help keep you from getting pregnant.

Still, many women who use these forms of birth control don't use condoms. If you use one of these birth control methods, make sure to also use a condom with every sex act. Also, don't use contraceptives that contain the spermicide nonoxynol-9 (N-9). N-9 can irritate the vagina, which might make it easier for an STI—including HIV—to get into your body. Keep in mind that women who are unable to become pregnant can get STIs.

- After sex, pull out the penis while it is still erect, holding the condom firmly at the base of the penis so it does not slip off.
- Use a new condom if you want to have sex again or in a different way.

Female condom

The female condom (Reality™) is made of the plastic polyurethane. It has a ring on each end. The inside ring holds the condom in place inside the vagina. The outer ring stays outside the vagina so it covers the labia. Use female condoms for vaginal sex if your partner can't or won't use a male condom.

- Check the wrapper for tears and to make sure the condom is not too old to use. Open the wrapper carefully—don't use your teeth or fingernails. Make sure the condom looks okay to use.
- Put the condom into the vagina up to 8 hours before having sex, but before the penis touches the vagina. The condom cannot disappear inside your body.
- It is okay to use water or oil-based lubricants. The lubricant is put on the inside and outside of the condom.
- After sex, remove the condom before standing up. Grasp the outside ring and twist the condom to trap in fluid and gently remove.
- Use a new condom if you want to have sex again or in a different way.





You might have heard of other ways to keep from getting STIs—such as washing genitals before sex, passing urine after sex, douching after sex, or washing the genital area with vinegar after sex. These methods **DO NOT** prevent the spread of STIs.

- **Talk with your sex partner(s) about using condoms before having sex.** This way, you can set the ground rules and avoid misunderstandings during a moment of passion. Hopefully, you and your partner will agree to use condoms all the time. But know this: You can control their use by making it clear that you will not have any type of sex at any time without a condom. Remember, it's your body, and it's up to you to make sure you are protected.
- **Don't assume you're at low risk for STIs if you have sex only with women.** Some common STIs are spread easily by skin-to-skin contact. Also, most women who have sex with

women have had sex with men, too. So a woman can get an STI from a male partner, and then pass it to a female partner.

- **Don't abuse drugs or alcohol. Heavy drinking and drug use can put you at greater risk of STIs.** Drinking too much and using drugs are linked to sexual risk-taking, such as having sex with more than one partner and not using condoms. Drug users who share needles risk exposure to blood-borne infections that also can be passed sexually, such as HIV and hepatitis B. Drinking too much alcohol or using drugs puts you at risk of sexual assault and possible exposure to an STI.
- **Get tested for STIs.** If either you or your partner has had other sexual partners in the past, get tested for STIs before becoming sexually active. Don't wait for your doctor to ask you about getting tested—ask your doctor! Many tests for STIs can be done at the same time as your regular pelvic exam.
- **Have regular checkups and pelvic exams—even if you think you're healthy.** During the checkup, your doctor will ask you a lot of questions about your lifestyle, including your sex life. This might seem too personal to share. But answering honestly is the only way your doctor is sure to give you the care you need. Your doctor might also do a Pap test to check for signs of cancer in your cervix. Ask your doctor how often you need a Pap test. Also, ask your doctor if the HPV vaccine is right for you. (See page 134 for more information.)

After diagnosis: What to do if you have an STI

Finding out that you have an STI might be difficult to face, especially if the source of your STI is an unfaithful partner or if it cannot be cured. For many, coping with the emotional side of having an STI is more difficult than managing the physical effects. But once you know what you are up against, you can start treatment right away and take steps to keep you and your partner(s) healthy.

Let partners know

Although you might not want to tell anybody about your STI, informing *all* your sexual partner(s) is the only way to stop the STI from getting passed to others or possibly reinfecting you. If your partner has other partners, they should be notified too. There are a few ways to do this:

1. Tell your partner(s) yourself and urge your partner(s) to get treated for the STI. For gonorrhea or chlamydial infection, you might be able to give your partner the needed medicine without him seeing a doctor. This is called expedited partner therapy (EPT). EPT is a last-resort option for partner(s) who won't or can't see a doctor. EPT is not possible in all states. If your partner is unwilling to seek treatment, ask your doctor if EPT is possible where you live.
2. Ask your doctor or the clinic where you were diagnosed to notify your sexual partner(s) anonymously. That means they won't disclose your name.

3. Tell your main partner, but ask that your medical provider inform all other or past partners.
4. Ask your doctor for help if you fear that notifying your partner(s) might lead to a violent or abusive reaction.

Follow treatment orders

Different STIs are treated differently. Follow your doctor's orders and finish any medicine you are given to cure or manage the infection. Even if your symptoms go away, you still need to finish all the medicine. Your doctor also will instruct you to not have sex until you and your partner(s) have finished treatment and until symptoms, such as sores, have completely cleared. You might also need to get a follow-up test after treatment to make sure the infection is cured. Doing these things is the only way to be sure your STI is treated and won't be passed to other people.



Be responsible sexually

Whether you are in a long-term relationship or involved with somebody new, it's up to you to act responsibly when

it comes to your and your partner's(s') sexual health. This means:

- talking honestly about your having an STI, so that your current or fu-

Frequently Asked Questions About the HPV Vaccine

I've never heard of the HPV vaccine. What is it?

Many women don't know about the HPV vaccine and question whether it is something they need. That's because the HPV vaccine came out in 2006. It is the first vaccine to prevent cervical cancer and other diseases caused by certain types of genital human papillomavirus (HPV). The vaccine protects women against four HPV types, which together cause 70 percent of cervical cancers and 90 percent of genital warts. It does not treat existing HPV infections. The vaccine is given through a series of three shots over a 6-month period. Getting the vaccine is important, because more than half of sexually active women and men are infected with HPV at some point in their lives.



Who should get this vaccine?

It is recommended for 11- to 12-year-old girls, and it can be given to girls as young as 9—an age when most girls are not yet sexually active. It is also recommended for 13- to 26-year-old females who have not yet received or completed the vaccine series.

How long does vaccine protection last?

So far, we know that protection from HPV lasts at least 5 years in women who have been vaccinated.

I'm older than 26. Why isn't the vaccine recommended for me—or for men?

So far, the vaccine has been widely tested only in 9- to 26-year-old females. Research is just beginning to look at whether the vaccine also is safe and effective in women older than 26. Researchers also are working to find out if the vaccine will prevent HPV in men and boys.

I'm pregnant. Should I get the HPV vaccine?

Pregnant women should not get the HPV vaccine until after the baby is born. There is not enough research to know how the vaccine might affect pregnant women and their unborn babies.

After I get the HPV vaccine, do I still need to be screened for cervical cancer?

Yes. There are three reasons why. First, the vaccine does not protect against all HPV types that cause cancer. Second, women who don't get all the vaccine doses (or at the right time) might not be fully protected. Third, women may not fully benefit from the vaccine if they got it after acquiring one or more of the four HPV types.

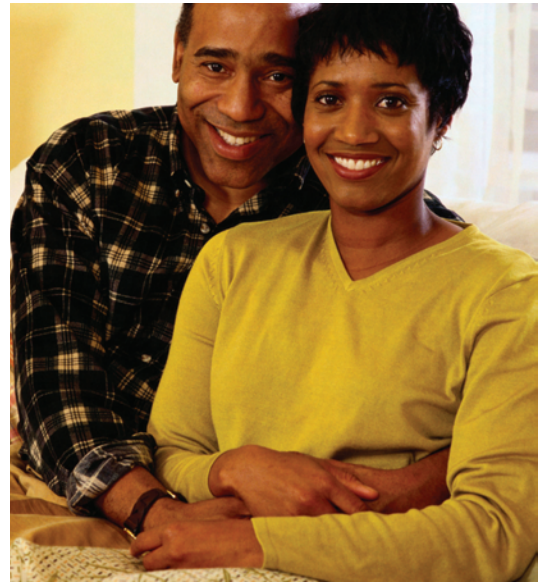
ture partner(s) can make an informed choice whether or not to be intimate with you

- abstaining from sexual contact during treatment or when you have symptoms, such as warts or sores

Take care of your emotions

If you recently found out that you have an STI, you might feel like you're the only one or that you're now "different" from other people. You might feel embarrassed, a sense of "dirtiness," shame, or guilt. These feelings might keep you from wanting to seek treatment or telling your partner(s). You also might worry about getting better or that an STI will keep you from having a long-lasting romantic relationship in the future. Rest assured that these feelings are normal at first and will lessen over time. The following tips might also help you to adjust to the diagnosis:

- Learning the facts about the STI will help put your situation in perspective and give you a sense of greater control over your health and well-being.
- Talking to a trusted friend or loved one will ease stress.



- Connecting with a support group can help you to feel less alone and to see how others have dealt with similar situations in a positive way.

Keep in mind that stigma is behind many of the negative feelings that surround STIs. If you are living with an STI, try not to become a victim of stigma yourself. The more you know about STIs, the better control you will have over your sexual health. At the same time, knowing more can make it easier to talk about STIs with a loved one. ■

One Woman's Story

At the start of my sophomore year, I couldn't have been more prepared to take on the year. I spent the summer interning and training for a race with my sister. I felt accomplished and healthy. But my first test of the year changed everything.

My yearly Pap showed abnormal cells, so we ran an HPV test, which confirmed that I have human papillomavirus (HPV). The next step was to see a gynecologist and have a colposcopy.

I was sure I would die from cervical cancer. If not, stress would do me in. I spent hours with the nurse practitioner, getting medical leave for doctor's appointments, worrying about how to cover the cost of procedures and doctor's visits, and coping with possibly spreading HPV to my boyfriend.

At some point, my sister sent a card with a few encouraging words. "Don't let three letters define you," she wrote. Her words helped me through the most difficult parts.

Telling my mom I wasn't sure how I got HPV was extremely hard. I was disappointed in myself, and it felt even worse that my mom might be too. Telling friends, who used to know everything about me, that I had a

doctor's appointment without elaborating or talking with my boyfriend about how HPV impacts him were the most challenging moments in those relationships.

This year I've had two Pap tests, two colposcopies, and an undying sense of guilt for bringing this on my family and boyfriend. I feel guilty because I knew how to prevent STIs. I can only be reassured knowing that when cell changes are monitored, cervical cancer is rare. I can't go back and change the past, but I can prevent this from getting worse. I choose what defines me, and this is not it.

Kathleen

Toms River, New Jersey

**Don't let three
letters define you.**

For More Information...

Office on Women's Health, HHS

200 Independence Ave SW, Room 712E

Washington, DC 20201

Web site: www.womenshealth.gov/faq/stdsgen.htm

Phone number: (800) 994-9662,
(888) 220-5446 TDD

Division of STD Prevention, CDC

1600 Clifton Rd NE

Atlanta, GA 30333

Web site: www.cdc.gov/std

Phone number: (800) 232-4636,
(888) 232-6348 TTY

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

409 12th St SW, PO Box 96920

Washington, DC 20090-6920

Web site: www.acog.org

Phone number: (202) 863-2518 Resource Center

American Social Health Association

PO Box 13827

Research Triangle Park, NC 27709

Web site: www.ashastd.org

Phone number: (800) 227-8922 STI Hotline

CDC National Prevention Information Network

PO Box 6003

Rockville, MD 20849-6003

Web site: www.cdcnpin.org

Phone number: (800) 458-5231

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

434 W 33rd St

New York, NY 10001

Web site: www.plannedparenthood.org

Phone number: (800) 230-7526