

Fundamentals of Teaching STIs

CORE CONCEPTS

STIs are very common. Prevention, testing, and treatment of STIs is a routine part of caring for one's sexual health.

RATIONALE

How do we teach, and why do we teach that way?

- Reducing shame and stigma by normalizing prevention, testing, and treatment of STIs is a primary goal of STI education.ⁱ
- It is important to treat everyone with respect, including people living with STIs or those who may be at risk for contracting an STI.
- When teaching, keep in mind that it is very likely that someone in the room has had an STI, or has a loved one who has.

TALKING POINTS

What do we say?

- STIs are very common.
- STIs can be transmitted via two types of contact: (1) fluids from a person with an infection enter another person's body, or (2) infected skin contacts susceptible skin of another.ⁱⁱ
- Risk of STI transmission is greatly lowered when people abstain from sex, use condoms when they do have sex, and do not share needles.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Using barrier methods such as condoms during sex can prevent STI transmission. Condoms are easy to get and easy to use. Many teens and adults successfully use condoms.
- Not all STIs are equally infectious, and different sexual behaviors pose different amounts of risk for STI transmission.
- The only way to know if one has an STI is to get tested.
- STIs frequently don't have any symptoms. People often don't know they have an STI unless they get tested.^{iv}

KNOW THE FACTS

FACT: Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) refer to the same infections and can be used interchangeably.

FACT: A person cannot get an STI from casual contact, like holding hands, toilet seats, or sharing food.

FACT: All STIs are treatable. STIs caused by bacteria and parasites are curable.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT STDs

What is the most common STI?

A lot of people have this question. The most common STI in the United States is the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).^v A person can lower their chances of contracting HPV by getting vaccinated. Without the vaccine, almost every sexually active person will get HPV at some time in their life. If someone is sexually active, using a condom or dental dam the right way every time they have sex will also lower their chances of getting HPV. If anyone has additional questions, the CDC website is a great source for information on HPV and other STIs.

Aren't people with STIs just kind of asking for it?

I'm glad you brought this up so we can talk about the stigma associated with contracting an STD. Everyone knows someone who has had an STD, whether they're aware of it or not. Feelings of blame and shame can keep people from getting the health care they need.^{vi} Preventing, testing, and treating STIs is a routine part of caring for one's sexual health. Do folks have any other questions about this?

My partner and I are both virgins. Should we get tested before having sex?

The word "virgin" can mean different things to different people. A person may consider themselves to be a virgin yet have engaged in sexual behavior that could transmit an STD. If someone is concerned that they or their potential partner may have been exposed to an STI through sexual transmission or other means, for example through IV drug use, they should talk with a doctor or medical provider. For more information or to find a place to get tested, go to www.plannedparenthood.org.



ⁱ "HIV Stigma and Discrimination." Avert, 2018, <https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-social-issues/stigma-discrimination>.

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- ⁱⁱ “Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ “Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/>.
- ^{iv} “Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/>.
- ^v “Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/>.
- ^{vi} “HIV Stigma and Discrimination.” *Avert*, 2018, <https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-social-issues/stigma-discrimination>.