

Three things everyone should know about sexually transmitted infections

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Whether you're in a relationship, hooking up or staying single, knowing how to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can help

you stay healthy and safe.

Here are a few things everyone should know about STIs.

1. What are STIs?

STIs are infections that pass from one person to another through [sexual activities](#), including [oral sex](#), [vaginal sex](#), [anal sex](#), genital contact or sexual fluids like semen. These types of infections can be caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites.

2. How common are STIs?

Sexually transmitted infections are more common than you may think.

In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 1 in 5 people in the U.S. has an STI. Young adults ages 14 to 25 are also at an increased risk of contracting an STI.

Some of the most common STIs among college students include:

- Human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Syphilis
- Herpes simplex virus (HSV)

It's important to remember that anyone can get an STI, regardless of their race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or number of partners.

3. Are they preventable?

Yes!

Sex is better when you don't have to worry about contracting STIs. Here are a few safer sex practices you can use to protect yourself and your partner.

Use protection

While contraceptives and birth control can help prevent pregnancy, they do not protect against sexually transmitted infections.

Using physical barriers like condoms and dental dams can help reduce your contact with sexual fluids, which can spread STIs. For the best protection, it's important to use a barrier every time you have oral, anal or vaginal sex.

If you use sex toys, wash them properly according to the manufacturer's instructions before using them on another person. You can also use condoms with sex toys for added protection. Just remember to change the condom before using it on another person.

Get vaccinated

Vaccines are a great way to protect yourself (and your partners) against sexually transmitted infections caused by certain viruses. Currently, there are vaccines to protect against the following STIs.

- Human papillomavirus (HPV): HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the U.S. Some forms of HPV can cause [genital warts](#), while others can lead to cancer.
- Hepatitis B (HBV): HBV causes a liver infection that can lead to short-term illness or longer-term health issues, including liver cancer.

Vaccines for HPV and hepatitis B are available.

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

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