



Teens and Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually transmitted diseases, also known as STDs, are infectious diseases that spread from person to person through sexual contact. Many teens have wrong ideas about STDs. These wrong ideas put teens at risk.

Some teens believe that STDs are only spread by intercourse. This is incorrect. STDs can be spread by any sexual contact.

Some teens believe that only older people get STDs. This is very wrong! Sexually transmitted diseases are more common in teens than in any other age group! 40% of STDs are found in teenagers. On average, a sexually active teenager has a 25% chance of catching a sexually transmitted disease each year.

Some teens believe that only 'bad' or 'trashy' or 'evil' people get STDs. This is wrong. Nice people get STDs. The popular guy or girl with straight A's and who is a champion in every sport can get an STD, or give you an STD, just as easily as someone who is struggling with lesser grades, or who is less social. STDs do not differentiate between rich and poor.

Some teens believe that they would know it or see it if their boyfriends or girlfriends had an STD. This is false. Guys and girls can look perfectly healthy and still be carrying and spreading STDs.

Some teens believe that their boyfriend or girlfriend would tell them if they had a sexually transmitted disease. This is usually not true. Most teens with an STD have no symptoms and are unaware that they have an STD. Other teens with

STDs have symptoms, but they are unaware that the symptoms are caused by an STD. Other teens can be in denial, and still others may not even care!

Some teens believe that condoms will prevent STDs. While it is true that condoms reduce the risk of spreading or receiving an STD, they do not prevent STDs. Condoms break, and skin contact occurs with areas that are not covered by a condom. The only way to completely prevent STDs is to [abstain](#) from all types of sexual contact.

Some teens believe that if they get an STD, all they need to do is get medicine for it and they will be fine. Unfortunately, many STDs don't go away and cause lasting harm. Herpes and genital warts can be treated, but they often keep coming back, over and over, causing life-long pain or embarrassment. Infections such as chlamydia and gonorrhea can cause permanent internal damage, making having children impossible, or causing permanent pain. HIV kills.

Some of the things that increase a person's chances of getting an STD are:

- Sexual activity at a young age. The younger a person starts having sex, the greater his or her chances of becoming infected with an STD.
- Lots of sex partners. Teens who have sexual contact with many different partners are at great risk and almost guaranteed to get an STD.
- Unprotected sex. Condoms do reduce your risk of getting an STD (but do not prevent them).

Teens need to be made aware that sexually transmitted diseases are very common in their age group. We strongly encourage abstinence. Realistically, however, we know that not all teens will choose abstinence. At an age when girls might be considering becoming intimately involved with boys, a visit to a gynecologist to talk about risks, peer pressure and being self-assertive is very important. Once a girl has been sexually active, annual exams are crucial because many STDs produce no symptoms while they do permanent harm.

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