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## April is STD Awareness Month



**April is STD Awareness Month, an annual observance to raise awareness about the impact of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and the importance of discussing sexual health with healthcare providers and, if sexually active, partners.**

### STDs are a major public health issue:

- CDC estimates more than 19 million new cases of STDs each year in the United States.
- In 2009, there were more than 1.5 million total cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea reported to CDC- making them the two most commonly reported infectious diseases in the United States.
- STDs have an economic impact: direct medical costs associated with STDs in the United States are estimated at \$17.0 billion annually.

While it is encouraging to know that gonorrhea infections are at their lowest rates ever and more people are being tested for chlamydia, some Americans are at greater risk of infection than others.

A person's social environment can determine the availability of healthy sexual partners. Because the STD prevalence is already higher in some communities than in others, individuals within these communities face a greater chance of infection with each sexual encounter - even those with only one sex partner.

- Half of new STD infections occur among young people ages 15 to 24 even though this age group makes up 25% of the sexually active population.
- African Americans account for approximately half of all reported chlamydia and syphilis cases and almost three-quarters of all reported gonorrhea cases even though they represent just 14 percent of the U.S. population.



STDs affect people of all races, ages, and sexual orientations, though some individuals experience greater challenges in protecting their health. People who struggle financially may end up in circumstances that increase their risk for STDs. For example, those who can't afford the basic necessities may have trouble accessing and affording quality health care, making it difficult to receive STD testing and other prevention services.

Regardless of community affiliation, personal decisions and actions regarding condom use, partner choice, and drug or alcohol abuse also affect a person's risk for STDs. When risk behaviors are combined with barriers to quality health information and STD prevention services, the risk of infection increases. To ensure that individuals have the opportunity to make healthy decisions, it is essential to address both the individual and social dynamics that contribute to their risk for STDs.

### The Importance of Testing

To build on current progress and reduce disparities, it is important to increase knowledge about sexually transmitted infections and make STD testing a part of routine medical care. Because many STDs have no

symptoms, those at risk need to get tested and find out if they are infected. CDC's current testing guidelines include:

- Annual chlamydia screening for all sexually active women under age 26, as well as older women with risk factors such as new or multiple sex partners.
- Yearly gonorrhea screening for at-risk sexually active women (e.g., women age 25 and younger, those with new or multiple sex partners, and women who live in communities with a high burden of disease).
- Syphilis, HIV, chlamydia, and hepatitis B screening for all pregnant women, and gonorrhea screening for at-risk pregnant women at the first prenatal visit, to protect the health of mothers and their infants.
- Screening at least once a year for syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV for all sexually active gay men, bisexual men, and other men who have sex with men.
- HIV screening for everyone between the ages of 13 and 64. Those at high risk for HIV infection (e.g., injection drug users and their sex partners, persons who exchange sex for money or drugs, sex partners of HIV-infected persons, and heterosexuals or men who have sex with men who themselves or whose sex partners have had more than one sex partner since their most recent HIV test) should be screened for HIV at least annually.



Health care providers should take a sexual health history of their patients and follow up with appropriate counseling, vaccination, testing, and if needed, treatment for STDs. Increased prevention efforts, including screening and treatment, are critical to reducing the serious health consequences of STDs.

## What You Can Do

- Talk with your doctor or health care provider about STDs and ask about recommended vaccinations and testing.
- Get tested. Visit [www.findSTDtest.org](http://www.findSTDtest.org) to find STD testing locations near you.
- Talk openly and honestly with your partner about STDs.

**Learn more about STDs, STD Awareness Month, and where you can find the nearest STD testing site in your area:**

- [CDC Sexually Transmitted Diseases](#)
- [CDC Podcasts- Be Smart Be Well: STD Videos](#)
- [STD Health Equity](#)
- [STD Awareness Month](#)
- [STD Prevention on Twitter](#)
- [GYT: Get Yourself Tested](#)
- [CDC Facebook](#)

Page last reviewed: April 4, 2011

Page last updated: April 4, 2011

Content source:

Page maintained by: Office of the Associate Director for Communication, Division of News and Electronic Media

URL for this page: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/STDAwareness/>

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