

Health Matters

Let's Talk About Sex—And Screening

(NAPSA)—Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), infections that are passed from one person to another during sexual contact, are more than a source of potential embarrassment—if untreated, they can lead to serious health problems.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 20 million cases of STIs occur each year, and half of these cases are among young people aged 15 to 24. There are more than 20 types of STIs, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital herpes, HIV/AIDS, human papillomavirus (HPV), and syphilis. Some of these conditions can go unnoticed because they may not cause obvious symptoms. Because of this, screening can help people who may not know they are infected get the care they need.

STI Prevention

Talking to your doctor or nurse about sex can be uncomfortable but having an honest discussion can help you protect your health. If you are sexually active, your doctor or nurse may talk with you about STIs at your next primary care visit and about ways to protect yourself and your partners, including using condoms. Your clinician may also refer you to a behavioral counselor for more information about practicing safer sex. Knowing if you are infected is a critical step to stopping the spread of STIs. If you learn you do have an STI, you can take the



Talking about even embarrassing infections with your doctor can help protect your health.

steps necessary to protect your health and that of your partners.

Two Common STIs

The most commonly reported STIs in the United States are chlamydia and gonorrhea. In 2012, there were more than 1.4 million cases of chlamydia. More than 330,000 cases of gonorrhea are reported to the CDC each year. It is hard to know exactly how many infections occur, however, because many infected people do not get tested.

Women often have no signs or symptoms of gonorrhea or chlamydia and therefore don't know that they are infected. If untreated, gonorrhea and chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (an infection of the female reproductive organs), ectopic pregnancy (an abnormal pregnancy in which a fertilized egg attaches outside the uterus), chronic pelvic pain, and infertility.

Who Should Be Screened?

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recently

recommended that all sexually active women ages 24 years and younger be screened for chlamydia and gonorrhea. In addition, older women who are at increased risk for infection should also be screened. This includes women who have more than one sex partner, have had an STI in the past, or have a sex partner who is infected with an STI.

Because there is not enough clear evidence that it is beneficial to screen men who do not have symptoms of chlamydia or gonorrhea, the Task Force does not recommend for or against this preventive screening in men. Unlike women, however, men generally develop symptoms from these infections and seek medical treatment.

If you are concerned about your risk for STIs, you should speak with your clinician to find out if screening is right for you.

Recommendations To Protect Your Health

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is an independent group of national experts in primary care, prevention and evidence-based medicine. The aim of the Task Force's work is to evaluate and identify critical preventive health services that a primary care professional can perform.

For more information on the Task Force and to read the full reports on screening for chlamydia and gonorrhea and recommendations about screening for other STIs, visit www.uspreventiveserVICEStaskforce.org.