

# Sexual Health/Safer Sex

It is not who you are—it is what you do—that makes you vulnerable to acquiring a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) (also known as Sexually Transmitted Diseases—STDs). STIs—including Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Hepatitis, Herpes, HIV, Molluscum Contagiosum, Crabs, Scabies, Syphilis, and Genital Warts (HPV)—are spread by contact with infectious microorganisms (ex: bacteria, viruses, and parasites) that are spread by person-to-person contact.

## Know the Facts about STIs:

- Each year 3,000 adolescents contract sexually transmitted infections, which is about one in four sexually experienced teens.
- STIs can be caused by viruses or bacteria. STIs caused by viruses include hepatitis B, herpes, HIV, and the human papilloma virus (HPV). STIs caused by bacteria include Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis.
- More than half of sexually active adults will get an STI at some point in their lives. Your chance of acquiring an STI increases when you have unprotected sex. Your risk is higher if you have had many sex partners, or if you have had sex with someone who has had many partners.
- Know that most people infected with an STI don't know they are infected—they may pass it on without knowing it.
- Know that one-in-three people who know they are infected with an STI admit they have lied about their infection just to have sex.
- Know that the use of alcohol and/or other drugs will decrease your ability to make informed decisions—mixing sexual activity with consumption of alcohol and/or other drug will impair your judgment. Know that some STIs, like herpes, can pass from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact between the penis and/or vagina, anus, and mouth. Another way to practice safer sex is to only have sex play that has no risk—or a lower risk—of passing STDs. This means no vaginal or anal intercourse.
- Know that the only 100% effective preventative measure is abstinence.
- Know that you can take action to prevent the spread of STIs by practicing “safer sex.”

## HIV—an STI/STD that Can Lead to AIDS

HIV—Human Immunodeficiency Virus—is also an STI—an STI infection that can lead to AIDS—Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome. Most people infected with HIV appear to be healthy. Many do not realize they have been infected. According to the CDC, more than 20% of people with HIV don't know they have it. About 40,000 men and women in the United States get HIV each year. HIV has few, or no, symptoms for up to 10 years or more before developing into AIDS. AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV—there is no cure for HIV/AIDS.

## HIV Transmission

Americans between the ages of 13–24 contract HIV at the rate of 2 per hour—however—no one “catches” HIV infection the same way one “catches” a cold. The most common way HIV is spread is by having vaginal or anal intercourse without a condom with someone who has HIV/AIDS. HIV is also spread by sharing needles or syringes with someone who has HIV/AIDS; being deeply punctured with a needle or surgical instrument contaminated with HIV; getting HIV-infected blood, semen, or vaginal secretions into open wounds or sores. Babies born to women with HIV/AIDS can get HIV from their mothers during birth or from breastfeeding.

You cannot get HIV from hugging, from someone's sweat, or insect bites. It is found in other fluids, saliva, sweat, tears, or urine, but not a high enough quantity to transmit HIV. There are many ways you can protect yourself from HIV. The surest way is to abstain from sexual intercourse and from sharing needles and “works” if you use steroids, hormones, or other injected drugs.

“Correct and consistent condom use,” says the CDC, “could break the back of the AIDS epidemic.”

## STI & HIV Testing

Early identification of HIV or of another STI infection enables people to start treatment sooner leading to better health

outcomes. If you have participated in sexual health-risk behaviors—had unprotected sexual contact, had unprotected vaginal, anal, oral sex with men who have sex with men; injected drugs or shared needles; unprotected sex—or if you have been diagnosed with tuberculosis, hepatitis, or another STD—speak with a health profession about testing for an STI and/or for HIV.

## Safer Sex & STI Prevention

Some kinds of sex play are “safer” because they have lower risk of infection than others. “Safer-sex” activities are those we choose to lower our risk of exchanging blood, semen, or vaginal fluids—the body fluids most likely to spread HIV. Each of us must decide what risks we will take for sexual pleasure.

Always take precautions—always choose “safer sex”—when choosing to engage in sexual activity. Safer sex is all about caring for your partner and for yourself. Be informed, be aware, know that there is no kind of skin-to-skin sexual activity (with a partner) that is totally risk-free.

Practicing “safer sex” is something all sexually active people can do—use of a latex condom or a female condom to keep blood, pre-cum, semen, or vaginal fluids out of each other’s bodies, don’t have sex play when you have a sore caused by a sexually transmitted infection. If you are sexually active protect yourself and your partner by practicing “safer sex.”

Remember to:

- Communicate with your partner—“safer sex” takes two;
- Use a latex condom—or a female condom—correctly and consistently 100% of the time. Condoms work by reducing skin-to-skin contact by forming a barrier, the barrier that also keeps one partners fluids from getting into or on the other (ensure your condoms are stored correctly and use only water-based lubricants).
- Do not use baby oil, mineral oil, cold cream, lotion, or Vaseline as a lubricant when using a condom. Doing so may be harmful to the latex and thus may increase the risk of breakage.
- NEVER—EVER—reuse a condom.
- Make informed, safer sex choices about sexual activity.
- If you are sexually active, get regular STI (including HIV) tests.

## Health Information and Campus Resources

There are many ways you can protect yourself from acquiring STIs, including HIV. The surest way is to abstain from sexual intercourse and from sharing needles and “works” if you use steroids, hormones, or other injected drugs. Safe sex practices will also limit your risk for STIs. Remember the risk affiliated with use/abuse of alcohol and other drugs that decrease judgment. Be aware – be prepared – protect yourself and others.

If you have concerns, if you have questions, visit the Student Health Service—1 Stadium Road—and speak with one of SBU’s health care professionals. Call 631-632-6740 to schedule an appointment.

You may also visit the Center for Prevention and Outreach Health Education office (located in the Student Health Center—2nd floor—room 213). Call 631-632-9338 to schedule an appointment with a Health Educator. The CPO offers health information and a list of resources for free confidential HIV Testing. CPO also hosts HIV Testing Days on campus. Check the CPO website for upcoming HIV testing dates and event information

<http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/cpo/> 