

# UNDERSTANDING SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs)

Sexually transmitted infections are infections that spread through sexual contact. Understanding these infections is crucial for making informed decisions about your health and relationships.

## CHLAMYDIA & GONORRHEA

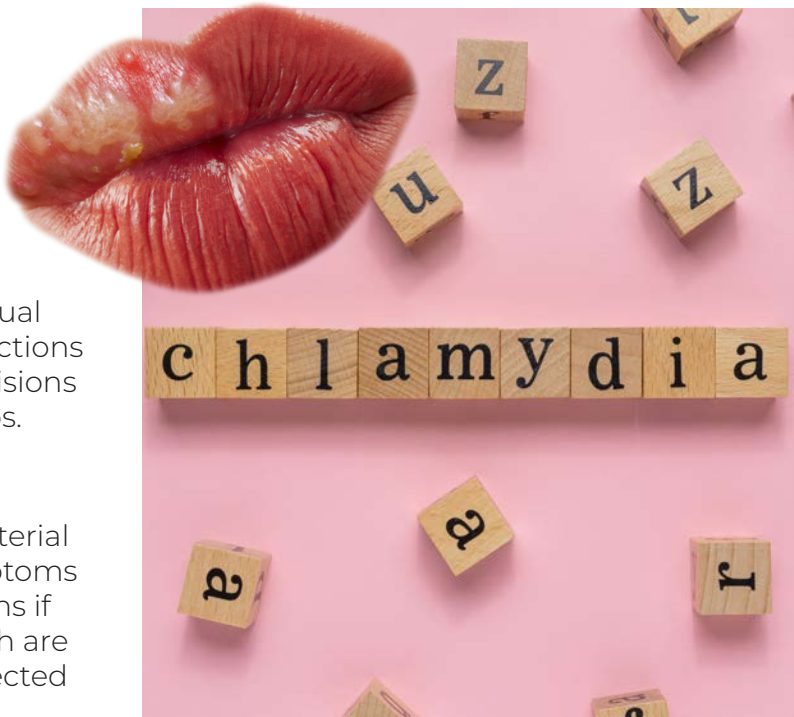
Chlamydia and Gonorrhea are bacterial infections that often have no symptoms but can cause serious complications if untreated, including infertility. Both are curable with antibiotics when detected early.

## HERPES

Herpes is a viral infection causing painful sores around the mouth or genital area. While manageable with medication, it stays in the body permanently and can be transmitted even without visible symptoms.

## HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is extremely common and usually clears on its own, but some types can cause genital warts or lead to cervical cancer later in life. Vaccines are available for prevention.

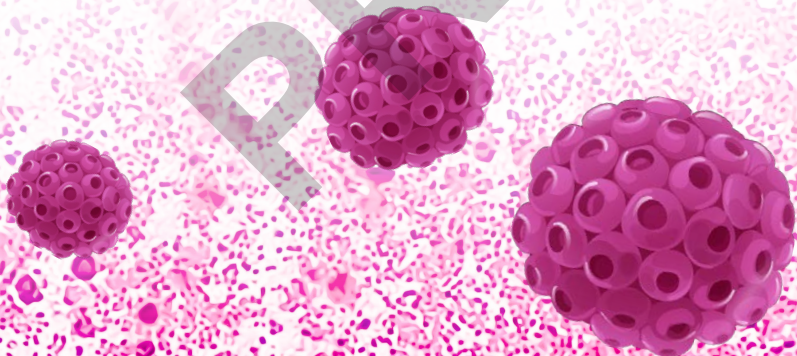


## SYPHILIS

Syphilis is a bacterial infection that progresses through stages. Early treatment with antibiotics is highly effective, but untreated syphilis can cause serious health problems including brain damage.

## HIV & AIDS

HIV attacks the immune system and can lead to AIDS if untreated. While modern treatments allow people with HIV to lead normal lives, prevention remains the best approach.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Centers for Disease Control**

[www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth/)

**National Coalition of STD Directors**

[ncsddc.org/resources/](http://ncsddc.org/resources/)

# STDs & ABSTINENCE

THE SAFEST CHOICE



**in the know**

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### WHY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AT HIGHER RISK

Young people face unique challenges that can increase their risk of STIs.

- Many teens and young adults have limited experience with relationships and may not fully understand the risks involved in sexual activity.
- Social pressures and the desire to fit in can push young people to engage in sexual activity before they're emotionally ready.

### ABSTINENCE VS. SAFE SEX: UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

Abstinence means choosing not to engage in sexual activity. It's the only 100% effective method for preventing STIs and unintended pregnancy.

Abstinence gives young people time to focus on:

- Personal growth
- Education
- Building healthy relationship skills

Safe sex refers to practices that reduce the risk of STIs and pregnancy, such as using condoms and getting regular testing for sexually transmitted diseases. While these methods significantly lower risk, they don't eliminate it entirely. Some STIs can be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact even with barrier protection.

**“Abstinence is the only 100% effective way to prevent STIs.”**

### SELF-RESPECT AND ABSTINENCE

Self-respect plays a vital role in maintaining abstinence. When you value yourself, you're more likely to make decisions aligned with your goals and values rather than being swayed by peer pressure or momentary desires. Self-respect means recognizing that your worth isn't determined by your sexual activity or lack thereof.



### REFUSAL SKILLS

Developing strong refusal skills is essential for maintaining abstinence when facing pressure. Start by being clear about your boundaries before others try to pressure you.

**Practice saying “no”** firmly but respectfully, using statements like, “I’m not ready for that,” or “That’s not something I want to do.”

**Suggest alternative activities** when someone pressures you. You might say, “Let’s watch a movie instead,” or “I’d rather go hang out with friends.” If someone continues to pressure you after you’ve said no, that’s a red flag about their character and respect for you.

**Remove yourself** from situations that might compromise your decision. If you’re at a party or gathering where you feel pressured, don’t hesitate to leave. Having a trusted friend or family member you can call for support or a ride can be invaluable.

Remember that anyone who truly cares about you will respect your decisions about your body and your values. Pressure, manipulation, or attempts to make you feel guilty about your choices are never acceptable in a healthy relationship.

### MOVING FORWARD

Choosing abstinence is a valid, healthy choice that deserves respect. Focus on building strong friendships, pursuing your interests, and developing the skills you’ll need for healthy relationships in the future. Remember that this choice is always yours to make, and you can be proud of standing by your values.

Medical testing for HIV is the only way to be sure you are not infected. Share your concerns about getting tested with your partner. They will thank you for it.

