

# Assess yourself

## STIs: Do You Really Know What You Think You Know?



The following quiz will help you evaluate whether your beliefs and attitudes about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) lead you to behaviors that increase your risk of infection. Indicate whether you believe the following items are true or false, then consult the answer key that follows.

1. You can always tell when you've got an STI because the symptoms are so obvious.
2. Some STIs can be passed on by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area.
3. Herpes can be transmitted only when a person has visible sores on his or her genitals.
4. Oral sex is safe sex.
5. Condoms reduce your risk of both pregnancy and STIs.
6. As long as you don't have anal intercourse, you can't get HIV.
7. All sexually active females should have a regular Pap smear.
8. Once genital warts have been removed, there is no risk of passing on the virus.
9. You can get several STIs at one time.
10. If the signs of an STI go away, you are cured.
11. People who get an STI have a lot of sex partners.
12. All STIs can be cured.
13. You can get an STI more than once.

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### Answer Key

1. **False.** The unfortunate fact is that many STIs show no symptoms. This has serious implications: (a) you can be passing on the infection without knowing it, and (b) the pathogen may be damaging your reproductive organs without you knowing it.
2. **True.** Some viruses are present on the skin around the genital area. Herpes and genital warts are the main culprits.
3. **False.** Herpes is most easily passed on when the sores and blisters are present, because the fluid in the lesions carries the virus. But the virus is also found on the skin around the genital area. Most people contract herpes this way, unaware that the virus is present.



4. **False.** Oral sex is not safe sex. Herpes, genital warts, and chlamydia can all be passed on through oral sex. Condoms should be used on the penis. Dental dams should be placed over the female genitals during oral sex.
5. **True.** Condoms significantly reduce the risk of pregnancy when used correctly. They also reduce the risk of STIs. It is important to point out that abstinence is the only behavior that provides complete protection against pregnancy and STIs.
6. **False.** HIV is present in blood, semen, and vaginal fluid. Any activity that allows for the transfer of these fluids is risky. Anal intercourse is a high-risk activity, especially for the receptive (passive) partner, but other sexual activity is also a risk. When you don't know your partner's sexual history and you're not in a long-term monogamous relationship, condoms are a must.
7. **True.** A Pap smear is a simple procedure involving the scraping of a small amount of tissue from the surface of the cervix (at the upper end of the vagina). The sample is tested for abnormal cells that may indicate cancer. All sexually active women should have regular Pap smears.
8. **False.** Genital warts, which may be present on the penis, the anus, and inside and outside the vagina, can



- be removed. However, the virus that caused the warts will always be present in the body and can be passed on to a sexual partner.
9. **True.** It is possible to have many STIs at one time. In fact, having one STI may make it more likely that a person will acquire more STIs. For example, the open sore from herpes creates a place for HIV to be transmitted.
10. **False.** The symptoms may go away, but your body is still infected. For example, syphilis is characterized by various stages. In the first stage, a painless sore called a *chancre* appears for about a week and then goes away.
11. **False.** If you have sex once with an infected partner, you are at risk for an STI.
12. **False.** Some STIs are viruses and therefore cannot be cured. There is no cure at present for herpes, HIV/AIDS, or genital warts. These STIs are treatable (to lessen the pain and irritation of symptoms), but not curable.
13. **True.** Experiencing one infection with an STI does not mean that you can never be infected again. A person can be reinfected many times with the same STI. This is especially true if a person does not get treated for the STI and thus keeps reinfected his or her partner with the same STI.

Sources: Adapted from Jefferson County Public Health, "STD Quiz," modified March 2009, [www.co.jefferson.co.us/health/health\\_T111\\_R69.htm](http://www.co.jefferson.co.us/health/health_T111_R69.htm); Adapted from Family Planning Victoria, "Play Safe," updated July 2005, [www.fpv.org.au/1\\_2\\_2.html](http://www.fpv.org.au/1_2_2.html).

## YOUR PLAN FOR CHANGE



The **Assessyourself** activity let you consider your beliefs and attitudes about STIs and identify possible risks you may be facing. Now that you have considered these results, you can begin to change behaviors that may be putting you at risk for STIs and for infection in general.

### Today, you can:

- Put together an "emergency" supply of condoms. Outside of abstinence, condoms are your best protection against an STI. If you don't have a supply on hand, visit your local drugstore or health clinic. Remember that both men and women are responsible for preventing the transmission of STIs.
- To prevent infections in general, get in the habit of washing your hands regularly. After you cough, sneeze, blow your nose, use the bathroom, or prepare food, find

a sink, wet your hands with warm water, and lather up with soap. Scrub your hands for about 20 seconds (count to 20 or recite the alphabet), rinse well, and dry your hands.

### Within the next 2 weeks, you can:

- Talk with your significant other honestly about your sexual history. Make appointments to get tested if either of you think you may have been exposed to an STI.

- Adjust your sleep schedule so that you're getting an adequate amount of rest every night. Being well rested is one key aspect of maintaining a healthy immune system.

### By the end of the semester, you can:

- Check your immunization schedule and make sure you're current with all recommended vaccinations. Make an appointment with your health care provider if you need a booster or vaccine.
- If you are due for an annual pelvic exam, make an appointment. Ask your partner if he or she has had an annual exam and encourage him or her to make an appointment if not.