

A photograph of a man and a woman standing back-to-back, wearing blue denim jeans. The man is on the right, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, and the woman is on the left, wearing a red patterned top. The background is a wooden floor. The text is overlaid on the image.

**How Getting It**

**ON**

**Can Let You**

**DOWN**

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

**What You Need to Know**

# DID YOU KNOW?

**One in every four college students has an STD.**

**80% of people who have a sexually transmitted disease experience no noticeable symptoms.**

**The CDC estimates that more than half of all young people living with HIV have not been diagnosed.**

## **Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)**

STD is a general term for diseases passed by sexual contact, vaginal, oral, or anal. The most common STDs affecting men are:

### **Herpes**

Herpes is a virus that can cause painful sores on or around the genitals, rectum, or mouth. Between outbreaks the herpes virus will remain dormant in the body.

There is no cure for herpes, but medications to manage outbreaks are available. If you or your partner has herpes, you should always wear a condom when you have sex. If either of you is experiencing an outbreak of herpes, you should refrain from all sexual activity.

### **Gonorrhea**

Not everyone has symptoms. Some men will experience a burning sensation during urination, white, green, or yellow discharge from the penis, and (rarely) pain/swelling in the testicles. Women may experience vaginal discharge or burning while urinating. Left untreated, gonorrhea can cause serious reproductive damage for both men and women and can be passed from a pregnant woman to her baby during childbirth.

Gonorrhea is easily treated, but has become resistant to many common antibiotics. If you still have symptoms after treatment, talk to your healthcare provider. Refrain from sexual activity for 7 days after you and your partner complete treatment.

### **Chlamydia**

Most people have no symptoms. However, for men symptoms may include discharge from the penis, burning during urination, and (rarely) pain/swelling in the testicles. Women with chlamydia may experience burning during urination or abnormal vaginal discharge. If untreated, chlamydia can cause serious damage to a woman's reproductive system and complications with pregnancy. Chlamydia may also cause infertility in men. Chlamydia of the rectum is a risk of anal sex.

Chlamydia is treatable if you complete your prescribed medication. Refrain from sexual activity for 7 days after you and your partner(s) complete treatment.

### **Human Papillomavirus (HPV)**

Rarely do men show symptoms of HPV, but it can cause warts on the infected area and you can pass the disease to your partner. Even without symptoms, HPV can lead to penile and anal cancers in men. For women, symptoms may be absent or hard to detect, but having HPV carries significant risk of cervical, anal and other cancers.

There is no cure for HPV, but it sometimes will clear up on its own within 1 to 2 years. CDC currently recommends the HPV vaccine for all young men up to age 21, and up to age 26 for men who have sex with men. The earlier you get the vaccine, the more effective it is.

## **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)**

HIV attacks your body's ability to produce and maintain disease-fighting cells. If the level of these cells drops low enough (or if you have certain infection-related cancers), your HIV is considered to have progressed to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). People with AIDS have virtually no ability to fight off illness.

There is no cure for HIV or AIDS, but treatments exist that can help manage HIV and reduce the chances of it developing into AIDS.

Men, particularly men who have sex with men, are at significant risk for HIV. If you are sexually active, it is critical to get tested for HIV regularly. If you're living with HIV, you should discuss your status with potential sexual partners. CDC estimates that over 1.1 million Americans are living with HIV infection but more than half of young people with the virus haven't been diagnosed.

## **Syphilis**

Syphilis happens in multiple stages. In the primary stage, there are one or more sores at the site of infection. Small and painless, they frequently go undetected and may go away on their own in 3 to 6 weeks.

The secondary stage shows rashes/sores across the mouth, anus, and potentially the rest of your body. However, it still may be painless and go unnoticed.

If you don't treat syphilis, it may become dormant in your body (you are still infected) or, in rare cases, it may progress to late stage syphilis. Late-stage symptoms can include reduced body control, numbness, paralysis, blindness, and dementia. Pregnant women may pass syphilis to their babies, potentially causing serious health issues for the child.

Syphilis is treatable with antibiotics, but damage from the disease cannot be undone.

Men who have sex with men are at higher risk for syphilis, and the sores make it easier to transmit HIV.



# Unintended Pregnancy

The majority of pregnancies among young people are unintended, but they are preventable. To avoid an unwanted pregnancy, discuss contraception methods that work for you and your partner. If you cannot agree on a method of contraception, you should not have vaginal sex.

## Preventing STDs and Pregnancy – How to Take Control of Your Body

The most common prevention tactics men can take are:

### Abstinence

Abstinence means refraining from all sexual contact. This is the only 100% effective method of protection against pregnancy and STDs.

### Condom

Condoms are effective in preventing pregnancy and some STDs. STDs, like gonorrhea and Chlamydia, are transmitted through fluid in the vagina or urethra. Condoms create a barrier these secretions can't pass through. For skin-to-skin contact STDs, such as HPV and syphilis, condoms block transmission of infectious material only if the infected skin is covered by the condom. If you or your partner is experiencing an outbreak related to any STD, refrain from sex until the outbreak has passed. When used correctly, condoms are 85-98% effective in preventing STDs.

Condoms also prevent pregnancy by blocking sperm from entering the vagina.

### Withdrawal

Withdrawal (also called “pulling out”) means removing your penis from your partner’s vagina before you orgasm. Withdrawal does not prevent STDs, and is less effective than a condom at preventing pregnancy. Overall, withdrawal for preventing pregnancy is considered to be about 73-96% effective.

### Fertility Awareness

Fertility awareness (sometimes called “natural family planning” or the “rhythm method”) means timing sex with your partner’s menstrual cycle so that you’re having sex only when she can’t get pregnant.

Fertility awareness methods do not prevent STDs. Techniques of fertility awareness have different levels of effectiveness, but across all methods of fertility awareness, the typical effectiveness rate is about 25%.

### Doubling Up

Doubling up means pairing any of the above methods with a form of female birth control - such as the pill, patch, or an intrauterine device. In every case this will increase your chosen method’s effectiveness at preventing pregnancy.

## You are in Control

You are in control of your body and you have the power to protect your sexual health. If your partner tells you they don’t want to use a condom, you can still insist on using one. It’s also your choice to not have sex if your partner says no to a condom or if you’re unsure/nervous about sexual activity. That’s your right, and nobody can take it away from you.

For more information, call the Men’s Healthline **888-MEN-2-MEN** or visit Men’s Health Network at: [www.menshealthnetwork.org](http://www.menshealthnetwork.org)

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