

WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO AN STD?

REMEMBER...

Focus on the medical facts about the disease. With most STDs, it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell who had it first. The important thing is that anyone exposed to an STD can contract it and should get tested and treated right away.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AND MY PARTNER(S)?

- Wait until you are sure both you and your partner have completed treatment before having sex again. Too often, people pass a disease back and forth by having sex before they have finished all their medication.
- STDs get from one person to another through sex. They pass easily through the delicate lining of the mouth, vagina, penis, and rectum. Abstinence (not having sex) is the only sure way to prevent the sexual transmission of STDs.
- If you have sex, you can reduce your risk of infection by using latex condoms every time. When used the right way, condoms can help protect you from many common STDs, including HIV. Be sure to put the condom on before the penis touches the vagina, mouth, or anus.
- If you have sex, reduce your number of partners. You can agree to only have sex with one partner who only has sex with you. Use condoms unless tests show that your partner does not have any STDs.
- If you are a person who injects drugs, never share your works (needle and syringe). Do not share or reuse cotton balls, rinse water, or other equipment.
- Do not share needles to pierce body parts, make tattoos, or for anything else.



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of State
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For HIV/STD questions, call
800-CDC-INFO (English/Espanol)
888-232-6348 (TTY).

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WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO AN STD (SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE)?

Chances are you are reading this brochure for one of two reasons:

1. Someone you had sex with or shared needles with has told you that they have an STD, and you may have it too.
2. A public health professional told you someone who tested positive for an STD named you as a sex or needle-sharing partner.

Either way, someone is concerned about your health and wants to ensure you do all you can to take care of yourself.

Naturally, you have a lot of questions. This brochure is to help answer those questions, to make sure you know what to do next, and to let you know where to go for more information.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXPOSED AND INFECTED?

If someone you spend a lot of time with has a cold, chances are they exposed you to it when they coughed or sneezed. You may or may not “catch” the cold. If you start having symptoms, even if they are milder or different from your friend’s, you have a cold. Your friend infected you.

With STDs, if you have sex with someone who has an STD, they have exposed you to that STD. It is important not to wait for symptoms before getting tested. Otherwise, you can risk serious health problems. Many people with STDs do not know they have an STD until they get very sick. We can usually do simple tests to see if you have an STD before problems arise.

OKAY, AM I INFECTED?

The only way to know if you have an STD is to go to a doctor’s office or clinic and have the appropriate tests done. Even if you have had a recent exam, the specific tests were probably not performed.

Because different STDs need different tests and treatments, you need to tell whoever examines you which STD you may have been exposed to. (For instance, “I had sex with someone who has chlamydia.”) This will help the doctor or clinician know which tests they need to do.

Because STDs can lead to serious, life-threatening conditions, your clinician may suggest you get treated without waiting for test results.

BUT I DO NOT HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS!

STDs often have no symptoms but can cause serious health problems even without symptoms. Meanwhile, they can pass the STD on to others and suffer serious damage to their reproductive system.

SO WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Go to your doctor, health center, or public health clinic and tell them you may have been exposed to an STD. Ask the person who gave you this brochure to help you identify the choices available. If you go to the same provider who treated your partner, all information remains confidential. Your information stays private, as does your partner’s information.

WHAT KIND OF TESTS ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Each STD has its own test, so be sure to tell your clinician which STD you were exposed to. Since people sometimes have more than one STD at a time, your clinician may test you for several STDs at the same visit.

Because having an STD can put you at a higher risk of contracting HIV, it is a good idea to have an HIV test, too. Talk to your doctor or clinician, and they should test you for multiple STDs at the same visit.

I CANNOT BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME!

You are not alone. According to the CDC, there were 26 million new STDs in 2018, with nearly half of them occurring among youth aged 15 to 24.

Many people find out because someone tells them, “I’ve been to the clinic and had a positive test. You should get tested, too.”

It is almost always upsetting. People can feel frightened, embarrassed, or experience many emotions at once. It is easy to be angry with your partner. It may be beneficial to remember that your partner told you or made sure the health department could inform you because they were concerned about your health. That took a lot of courage.

It is important to remember that just because your partner tested first does not mean they had the infection first. There is usually no way of knowing who gave it to whom.