

Leader's Resource

STD Facts: True or False?

1. **A person can always tell if she or he has an STD.**

False. People can and do have STDs without having any symptoms. Women often have STDs without symptoms because their reproductive organs are internal, but men infected with some diseases like chlamydia also may have no symptoms. People infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, generally have no symptoms for some time, even years, after infection.

2. **With appropriate medical treatment, all STDs except HIV can be cured.**

False. Herpes, an STD caused by a virus, cannot be cured at the present time.

3. **Condoms are the most effective safeguard against the spread of STDs.**

False. Abstinence from sexual intercourse is the best way to prevent the spread of STDs. Condoms are the next best thing, but only abstinence is 100 percent effective.

4. **Using latex condoms will help prevent the spread of STDs**

True. Latex condoms can help prevent the spread of STDs, but they must be used correctly. Latex condoms are not 100 percent effective because they can occasionally break or come off during intercourse. Lambskin condoms are ineffective and should not be used.

5. **The organisms that cause STDs can only enter the body through either the woman's vagina or man's penis.**

False. STD bacteria and viruses can enter the body through any mucus membranes, including the vagina, penis, anus, mouth and, in some cases, the eyes. HIV can also enter the body when injected into the bloodstream from shared IV drug needles.

6. **Women who have regular Pap smears will also find out if they have an STD.**

False. The Pap smear is a test specifically designed to detect cervical cancer and may detect a herpes infection, but it will not indicate the presence of other STDs. A woman who thinks she may have been exposed to an STD, must be honest with her health practitioner and ask for STD tests.

Adapted from *Teen Outreach: Youth Development Through Service and Learning* Association of Junior Leagues, International Inc., New York, N.Y., 1994.

7. **Teenagers can receive testing and treatment for STDs without having their parents notified.**

True. In every state, minors—12 years or older in most states, 14 years and older in some states—can be tested and treated for STDs without a parent's permission or notification. Records are confidential, so that no one can go to the health clinic and find out if a teenager was treated there. Many community health clinics provide STD tests and treatment at no cost, or for a small fee, to adolescents or other patients who cannot pay.

8. **You cannot contract an STD by masturbating, or by holding hands, talking, walking or dancing with a partner.**

True. STIs are only spread by close contact with an infected person. Anyone can be infected by having oral, anal or vaginal intercourse with a partner who is infected. In the case of HIV, a person can also be infected by sharing needles or works to use IV drugs with an infected partner.

9. **STDs are a new medical problem.**

False. STDs have existed since people began recording history. There is evidence of medical damage caused by STDs in ancient writings, art and skeletal remains. Writers of the Old Testament, Egyptians writing on papyrus and the famous Greek physician Hippocrates all mention symptoms of diseases and sufferings which we know today was caused by STDs. Cures for most STDs were not found until the 1900s, and some still cannot be cured.

10. **STDs can cause major health problems and some can even result in death.**

True. HIV infection, which can be spread through sexual contact, is at present always fatal. Genital herpes appears to be related to cervical cancer in women, and can damage babies born to infected women. Some STDs such as gonorrhea and chlamydia can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). If untreated, PID may lead to sterility, heart disease or death.

11. **Only people who have vaginal, anal or oral intercourse can contract an STD.**

False. Infants can contract STDs such as herpes, gonorrhea and HIV infection during their mother's pregnancy and/or during the birth process.

12. **It does not hurt to put off STD testing and treatment after you think you have been infected.**

False. Once an STD infects a person, it begins damaging health. If someone waits weeks or months before getting tested and treated, her or his health may

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be permanently damaged, even after treatment begins. In addition, the person can spread untreated STDs to sexual partners.

13. **A woman using oral contraceptives should still insist that her partner use a latex condom to protect against STDs.**

True. Oral contraceptives do not prevent STDs, so a condom is still necessary for protection.

14. **Washing the genitals immediately after having intercourse may help prevent some STDs.**

True. Personal cleanliness alone cannot prevent STDs, but washing away a partner's body fluids right after intercourse may be somewhat helpful. Washing does not, however, prevent pregnancy or stop HIV from entering the body through the mucus membranes in the mouth, anus, penis or vagina

15. **It is possible to get some STDs from kissing.**

True. It is we but possible to be infected by syphilis through kissing, if the infected person has chancres (small sores) in or around the mouth. The herpes virus can also be spread by kissing if active lesions are present.

16. **Oral is a safe way to have sex if you do not want to get a disease.**

False. It is possible to be infected with HIV, gonorrhea and herpes from oral sex.

17. **People usually know they have an STD within two to five days after being infected.**

False. Many people never have symptoms and others may not have symptoms for weeks or years after being infected. HIV infection may not show symptoms for years, but the infected person is capable of infecting other partners during that time;

18. **The most important thing to do if you suspect you have been infected by an STD is to inform your sexual partner or partners.**

False. The most important thing to do is to seek immediate medical treatment. Symptoms of an STD may never appear, or may go away after a short time, but the infection continues inside the person's body. She or he can suffer serious physical damage and can continue to infect others. Once medical treatment is begun, the person or a health practitioner can inform sexual partners. In the meantime, it is also important for the infected person to abstain from any sexual contact.

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