

The American Social Health Association (ASHA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the health of individuals, families, and communities, with a focus on preventing sexually transmitted infections. ASHA publishes a line of award-winning educational materials and provides interactive health communications through call centers and Web sites. ASHA also conducts research and leads advocacy efforts for proper attention and funding to STI research and programs.



Quest Diagnostics, the nation's leading provider of diagnostic testing, information and services, offers all types of testing. Our tests provide insights that help physicians and healthcare professionals make decisions that can improve your health. Quest Diagnostics offers more than 3,000 different routine and specialized tests and performs over 250 million tests each year. Ask your doctor today about tests made available through Quest Diagnostics.

Visit these Web sites:

www.questdiagnostics.com/library

www.ashastd.org

www.iwannaknow.org (for teens),

www.quierosaber.org (en español)

© American Social Health Association
May not be reproduced without written permission

Quest, Quest Diagnostics, the associated logo and all associated Quest Diagnostics marks are the trademarks of Quest Diagnostics.

©2006 Quest Diagnostics Incorporated. All rights reserved.
www.questdiagnostics.com PP1974 09/2006

All third party marks-® and ™- are the property of their respective owners.



Protect Yourself and
Your Baby from Sexually
Transmitted Infections (STIs)



I'm pregnant...should I worry about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)?

There is a lot to think about when you want to have a baby or when a baby is on the way. One important step is to learn about STIs because they can harm your baby. You may want to talk with your doctor or nurse about getting tested for STIs. The more you know, the more you can do to have a healthy baby.

What are STIs?

STIs are caused by germs that live on the skin or in bodily fluids like semen, vaginal discharge, or blood. Anyone who has sex of any kind or shares needles can get an STI. Many STIs can be passed from a mother to her unborn baby. Since STIs often show no symptoms, you may not know you've had an infection for a long time—even before becoming pregnant.



10 things you can do to protect yourself and by protecting yourself you will protect your baby

1. Talk with your doctor or nurse about STIs.
2. Get tested.
3. Ask your partner to get tested, too.
4. If you are diagnosed with an STI, begin treatment.
5. Take all the medicine your doctor or nurse gives you.
6. Don't have sex until you and your partner(s) are cured. (Some STIs like herpes or HIV cannot be cured. Talk to your doctor or nurse about what to do if you have one of these STIs.)
7. Use condoms. Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are highly effective in preventing transmission of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. In addition, correct and consistent use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of other sexually transmitted diseases.
8. Limit your number of partners.
9. Do not use alcohol, drugs, or any medicines not given to you by your doctor.
10. Take care of yourself: eat a well-balanced diet, get rest, and exercise. (This won't keep you from getting an STI, but it will keep your body healthy...and that is good for you and your baby.)

“I’m embarrassed to talk to my doctor about stuff like STIs!”

Your doctor or nurse can answer your questions, and they will give you facts you can count on. Even if you don’t think you have an STI, it’s good to know the facts about STIs when you are pregnant.

“Well, I’ve heard that...”

Many people will tell you what they have heard about STIs. But what they tell you may not be true. Trust only the facts your doctor or nurse tells you.

- Don’t think that because you already have had a test for STIs, that you are healthy now. If you have sex, even with one partner, you need to be tested again.
- Don’t play the waiting game. STIs are tricky. They don’t always show signs or symptoms. The only way to know if you or your partner has an STI is to **get tested**.
- Don’t think you can’t get an STI or HIV while you are pregnant. You can.
- Don’t think that if you have sex with only one partner, you can’t get an STI. You can.

Why get tested?

If you have an STI or get one from your partner during pregnancy and don’t know it, your baby could be in danger. Your doctor may want to test you for certain STIs because it is required by state law and/or recommended by professional medical organizations. If you find out you have or your partner has an STI, you can get help from your doctor or nurse. Many STIs are easy to treat and cure. Even if you have been tested before, you may need to be tested again.

Why get treatment?

- The earlier you get treatment, the better. The sooner you start taking medicine to get rid of your STI, the sooner you will be healthy. Be sure to take all the medicine your doctor or nurse tells you to, exactly like they tell you to.
- Don’t have sex with your partner until both of you have finished treatment. If you have sex before the STI goes away, you and your partner could pass it back and forth between the two of you.
- Some STIs, like herpes and HIV, cannot be cured, but there are still medicines you can take that may help your symptoms.
- Talk to your doctor about how you can protect your baby and your partner from STIs.

Condoms?!? But I'm already pregnant!

It might seem strange to use condoms now that you are pregnant, but they really are important. Condoms are a shield against STIs, and they help protect you and your baby. STIs can be very harmful to unborn or newborn babies. By using condoms every time you have sex, you are protecting three very important people: your partner, your baby, and you – your baby's mom.



Can STIs harm babies?

Yes. A pregnant woman who has an STI can pass it to her baby. A baby that has an STI might become blind, have brain damage or serious liver problems, and may even die.

- Herpes is rare in babies, but it can cause blindness, brain damage, painful blisters on the skin, or even death. (Special note: Genital herpes and cold sores on the mouth are both caused by the herpes simplex virus. Do not let people who have cold sores on their lips kiss your baby. It can make your baby sick.)
- Chlamydia can cause eye and lung infections in newborns.
- Gonorrhea can cause eye infections that lead to blindness.
- Hepatitis B can cause serious liver problems, even death. Ask your doctor about a protective shot or vaccine dose that should be given to your baby at birth.
- Human papillomavirus (HPV), the virus that causes genital warts, is rare in babies, but it can cause warts in a baby's throat.
- Syphilis may cause blindness, brain damage or death.
- HIV can be passed to a baby and can lead to death.

Fast facts about HIV/AIDS

- People who have an STI have a greater risk of getting HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS.
- People can have HIV for years without knowing it.
- A woman could get pregnant without knowing she has HIV. She could pass the virus to her baby. It is also possible to pass HIV through breast milk.
- Lots of women thought HIV and AIDS couldn't happen to them: now they have it and their babies do, too.
- If you know you have HIV, there are drugs you can take that can reduce the risk of passing the virus to your baby.
- Get tested and know for sure.

To learn more about STIs and how you can protect yourself and your baby, talk with your doctor or nurse, go to your local health department, or call:

American Social Health Association (ASHA)

toll free at

1-888-STD-AIDS (1-888-783-2437)

24 hours a day, every day

National Herpes Hotline

1-919-361-8488

9 a.m. to 6 p.m., ET, Monday-Friday

National STI Hotline

1-800-227-8922

24 hours a day, every day

CDC Information Service

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)

24 hours a day, every day

Or, for more information, you can visit
www.questdiagnostics.com/library



