

Study: Young people at risk for STDs often don't get tested

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Although they account for half of all new sexually transmitted infections, most young people between the ages of 15 and 25 have never been tested for those infections, according to a study published in the May issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

The 2013 survey of 3,953 adolescents and young adults by researchers at the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 11.5 percent had been tested for a sexually transmitted infection in the previous year, including 17 percent of females and 6 percent of males.

Overall, [young people](#) between 15 and 25 make up a quarter of the population who are sexually experienced. But the survey found that nearly half - 42 percent - of those who had sex and had not been tested for disease thought they were not at risk.

Researchers didn't ask the young people why they believed they weren't at risk. But "misunderstanding of risk and lack of access to care" are recognized barriers to testing, said Kendra Cuffe, a [health](#) scientist in the Division of STD Prevention at the CDC and the study's lead author. (STD, which stands for "[sexually transmitted disease](#)," is often used interchangeably with sexually transmitted infection.) Young people also cited worries about the confidentiality of testing and the cost.

Young people may be concerned about who has access to their private health information. Under the health law, young adults can generally stay on their parents' health plan until they reach age 26. But insurers may

send notices informing policyholders, in this case their parents, about services that have been provided.

If they're older than 18, [young adults](#) "have the same privacy rights as other adults, but their situation is complicated because they're on a plan with someone else who is the policyholder," said Abigail English, director of the Center for Adolescent Health & the Law.

The health law also requires insurers to cover preventive services without requiring people to pay for them if they're recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, a nonpartisan group of medical experts that makes determinations based on scientific evidence of benefits and harms. But men are at a disadvantage in some instances.

For example, the [task force](#) recommends that people of both sexes be tested for HIV, but testing for chlamydia and gonorrhea, the most common [sexually transmitted infections](#), is recommended only for sexually active women, not sexually active men.

The task force concluded that there wasn't enough information available to assess testing in men.

"We know that both women and men can get and transmit [the infections], but if it hasn't been studied, the task force doesn't recommend it," said English.

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