

Facts about STI testing

November 9 2017

When we talk about sexual health, many of us get a little uncomfortable. But why? We aren't afraid to talk about getting the flu virus or strep throat. Still, there seems to be a taboo when it comes to talking about, and getting tested for, infections below the belt. We want to change that.

Sexually transmitted infections

The most common [symptom](#) of a [sexually transmitted infection](#) (STI) of any kind is actually no symptom. That's why it's so important to get tested regularly, even when nothing feels off.

Bacterial STIs

The three most common STIs are chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis. Since they are all bacterial, in most cases they can be cured with antibiotics, and catching them early can prevent complications.

One important thing to remember: If prescribed antibiotics for any of these, it's important to complete the entire course of antibiotics. This prevents antibiotic resistance and ensures all partners are healthy and stay that way.

Viral STIs

STIs that are viral, such as herpes, [human papilloma virus](#) (HPV) and HIV, are treatable but not truly curable.

Herpes and HPV are both very common. If you've ever had a cold sore or a wart, respectively, you've had a strain of these viruses. Most of the time we aren't even aware we have these viruses because the symptoms tend to be intermittent or minor, and, again, many people don't experience any symptoms at all. Some do have complications, however, and if left untreated, these viruses can cause some long-term health concerns.

Like herpes and HPV, HIV can stay asymptomatic for long periods of time, so it's possible to spread the [virus](#) before you know anything is wrong. Newer treatments for HIV have had major success, but the virus can still lead to health concerns.

Getting tested

It's normal to feel a little apprehensive about getting tested. It helps to know exactly what to expect. At Wardenburg, a [sexual health](#) appointment can involve talking to your [healthcare provider](#) about your sexual activity and understanding your risks.

You can even skip this appointment and go straight to the lab in Wardenburg for walk-in testing. The testing process, depending on the STI, usually involves taking quick samples or swabs. Then you're on your way in no time!

Since STIs happen regardless of how we feel about them, it's better to know and find out as soon as possible. Testing results are usually available within a couple of days, which means no sweating it out.

Since many STIs are curable, and all are treatable, your provider will work up a plan to keep you healthy if any tests do come back positive. If you did walk-in testing at the lab without talking to a provider first and test positive, someone from Wardenburg will reach out to set up

treatment and an appointment if needed.

When to get tested

It's a good idea to get tested every six months, or with each new partner, especially for asymptomatic infections.

Additionally, if you've ever had symptoms of an STI (like sores in the genital area, abnormal discharge, itchiness, burning or painful urination), it's time to get tested. You may also want to get tested if you or your partners have ever used injectable drugs not prescribed by a doctor or shared needles, as these can impact risk levels for STIs.

If you're unsure about your status or whether you should get tested, talk to your healthcare provider to determine what tests might be right for you and how you and your partners can protect yourselves in the future.

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

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