

STDs: A serious health threat at every age

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(HealthDay)—If you're back on the dating scene after being in a monogamous relationship, know that STDs, or sexually transmitted diseases, aren't just a concern for teens and people in their 20s. STD

rates are rising in older adults.

STDs are usually caused by viruses or bacteria and can be spread from person to person through any type of sexual contact that involves the skin, [body fluids](#), the mouth, the genitals and/or the rectum. In fact, they're the most common contagious infections in the United States after colds and the flu, with millions of people affected every year.

Many of these infections have symptoms that are barely noticeable, but their effects can be devastating, especially if they go undiagnosed and untreated. Pelvic inflammatory disease is a complication in women, often due to chlamydia and gonorrhea, and can lead to infertility.

In addition to [sexual contact](#), you can also pick up trichomoniasis if you're exposed to the parasite that causes it, often via a moist object, like a damp towel, wet clothing or a toilet seat.

Because you can have an STD and not know it, it's important to get routine testing if you're not in a completely monogamous relationship. Some can be cured, while others can be managed if caught early.

Remember that when you become sexually intimate with a [new partner](#), you're exposed to the sexual health history of all his or her previous partners. Both of you should be tested before taking this step.

For your protection

- Talk with every new partner about STD testing and about using condoms before having sex.
- Use condoms correctly and every time you have sex.
- Have regular sexual health check-ups even if you think you're healthy.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has an extensive [STD resource center](#) with sections for different ages and populations.

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