

# Sexually Transmitted Infections

# 4

## PURPOSE

An important aspect of sexual health is preventing sexually transmitted infections, which are on the rise in the U.S., with half of new cases occurring in people under 25. Students are better equipped to make healthy decisions when they know the facts about STIs and where to access information, resources and services. The activities in this lesson present factual information and reduce stigma about STIs and HIV. Students will sort the myths from the facts, demonstrate how easily STIs can be transmitted and how they can be prevented. Students will be able to identify resources for information and services, including testing and treatment and personalize how they would respond and communicate with a partner about STIs.

## STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

1. Understand how common STIs are among people their age.
2. Debunk common myths and learn facts about STIs and how they are transmitted.
3. Identify general characteristics of common STIs and HIV.
4. Understand the importance of STI testing and treatment.

## LESSON SUMMARY

Activities	Minutes	Materials and Preparation Checklist
<b>A Transmission Game</b>	<b>10</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Read through the activity. <input type="checkbox"/> Notecards (one per student) <input type="checkbox"/> On the backs of the cards write in small print: the letter <b>V</b> on one card; divide the remaining cards equally and write a small letter <b>U</b> on half, and a <b>P</b> on the other half. <input type="checkbox"/> Ask a student ahead of time to be the person with the <b>V</b> notecard. <input type="checkbox"/> If possible, music to play during the game.
<b>B STI Myths and Facts</b>	<b>15</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Preview and select one of the recommended videos. <input type="checkbox"/> Make copies of the <b>STI Myth and Fact Quiz</b> for each student.
<b>C STI Scavenger Hunt</b>	<b>30</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Internet access and devices for students to complete research activity, in class or as homework. <input type="checkbox"/> Make copies of the <b>STI Scavenger Hunt</b> and <b>Understanding HIV</b> worksheets for each student.
<b>D Reflection &amp; Closure</b>	<b>5</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Notecards or journaling option for students to complete reflection questions.

# LESSON



## INTRODUCE THE LESSON

Say,

In the last class we talked about how to communicate effectively and recognize when affirmative consent is present, or not, in sexual situations. Communication and consent are also important when it comes to preventing sexually transmitted infections. STIs are bacteria and viruses that are spread through vaginal, oral or anal sex and if left undiagnosed and untreated may negatively affect a person's health.

With the rates increasing in Maine (and in the U.S.), it's important to know the facts about STIs and how to prevent them from spreading.

### FACILITATOR NOTE

You may have noticed that the terms **sexually transmitted infection (STI)** and **sexually transmitted disease (STD)** are often used interchangeably. A disease is usually associated with clear signs and symptoms. Many common STIs/STDs have few or no signs or symptoms, so that is why you often see them referred to as infections rather than diseases. Throughout the *Best Practices* curriculum, we will use the term STIs, though you will see the term STD used in many of the web resources included in this curriculum.



## ACTIVITY 4A: TRANSMISSION GAME



- Prepare notecards for this activity in advance. On the backs of the cards write in small print: the letter **V** on one card; divide the remaining cards equally and write the letter **U** on half, and **P** on the other half.
- Ask a student ahead of time if they are willing to be the person with the virus (V) on their card and let them know that in this game they'll be the one that is fictitiously and unknowingly spreading the virus to others.
- Distribute the prepared notecards, one to each student. Do not mention the letters on the backs of the cards.
- Tell students that they will all get up, mingle around the room, find someone to talk to and respond to a simple question of your choosing. For example: *What's your favorite food?* or *What's one thing you've learned so far in this class?*
- Students will continue moving around the room, talking to as many people as they can in the time allotted. Each time they talk to someone new, they will sign their names on each other's card. If possible, play upbeat music while the students mingle and collect signatures. This should only take a few minutes, depending on the size of the group.

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- Ask students to take their seats. Ask your volunteer with the **V** on their card to stand. Explain that for the purpose of the game, this person has the virus that causes the common cold.
  - Say, **Anyone who has this person’s signature on your card, please stand up. You have been exposed to this virus. Now for the people still sitting, if you have the signature of any of these people standing on your card, you get to stand up too.** Repeat this process again until most of the class is standing.
  - Next, ask your students to look at the back of their card and say, **Who has a P on their card? This P stands for protection. This means that even though you were exposed to the virus, you were protected because you didn’t engage in activities that would put you at risk of catching the virus. If you have a P on your card, you may sit down. In the case of the common cold, protection might mean that you didn’t share food, drinks or utensils, you washed your hands regularly, and you didn’t engage in other activities that would’ve exposed you to the virus.**
  - The rest of you standing probably have a **U** on the back of your card. This means you were unprotected because you engaged in contact that exposed you to the virus. Based on these actions, you may be infected with the common cold virus.
  - Remind students: **This was of course just a fictional scenario showing how quickly an infection or virus can spread among a group of people. So, let’s thank \_\_\_\_\_ for being willing to act as the person with the virus!**

## **DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY**

Ask the following questions:

1. When I said that the people standing were exposed to a virus, what was your first thought?
2. As you realized you could have unknowingly passed the virus to others, how did you feel?
3. If you had known that a virus was spreading while you were gathering signatures, what would you have done differently?
4. For those of you who could sit down, how did it feel knowing you didn’t have the virus?
5. Some viruses spread easily while others are spread only through specific actions. Both a cold virus and STIs are common, so why do you think there is more stigma about getting an STI?

Address the shame and stigma around STIs by saying: **Historically, there has been a lot of stigma related to STIs because of the way they are spread. This stigma often means that people are less likely to talk about STI prevention and may avoid getting tested. STIs are not something people should feel ashamed of. In fact, the more we talk about STIs openly, the more we can do to protect ourselves and our partners.**

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## SUMMARIZE

Say, While sexually transmitted infections don't spread as easily as a virus like the common cold, they are still very common. Half of the new cases of STIs in the U.S. are among people ages 15-24. In addition to not having sex, using protection, such as barrier methods like condoms and oral dams, is an effective way to avoid spreading STIs.

During the transmission game, you were all notified that you had been exposed to a virus. This is not always how it happens in real life. That's why, when it comes to STIs, knowing the facts and being able to talk with a partner about prevention and testing is so important.

### FACILITATOR NOTE

In Maine, certain STIs are reported by medical providers to the Maine CDC. This reporting is confidential and allows the Maine CDC to track and measure the spread of common STIs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, Hepatitis and HIV, to help prevent further spread in the community. Disease Intervention Specialists track the spread of these STIs and can anonymously contact all known partners of someone who has tested positive for these reportable STIs.

There are also websites, such as [tellyourpartner.org](http://tellyourpartner.org) or [stdcheck.com](http://stdcheck.com), where someone who has tested positive for an STI can anonymously inform their known sexual partners. These services reduce barriers in informing partners of their exposure and can increase testing and prevention of STIs.



## ACTIVITY 4B: STI MYTHS AND FACTS



Say, We don't often talk about STIs in every day conversation. When people don't have the facts, it can lead to misinformation about STIs. In this activity, we will go over some of the facts about STIs.

### Options for Introducing STIs

**Option 1:** Students can take the *STI Myth and Fact Quiz* as a pre-assessment to see what they already know and where there are gaps in knowledge.

**Option 2:** Use a video from the recommended list below, or another video you have found. Note: Videos often use the term STD, which you can preface for your students.

- *STD Myths* video from Sex, Etc. (7 minutes). Written by teens, for teens, this Sex Etc. video uses youth reporters to debunk common myths and provide basic facts about STIs. <https://sexetc.org/videos/std-myths-2/> (additional information on STIs and HIV are included on the Sex, Etc. website).
- *What are STDs? #FactCheck* from Amaze.org (2.17 minutes). This animated video includes information on how STIs are spread, how some are curable and others managed, STI testing and the importance of using condoms. (Amaze.org has additional videos about STDs, HIV and using protection.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Sbgg8icODY>

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- *What Are STDs and How Are They Transmitted?* From Planned Parenthood (1.53 minutes). This short video reduces stigma by discussing how common STIs are. The video defines STIs and discusses how they are spread, possible symptoms, prevention methods, including abstinence and barrier methods, testing and types of treatment. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBMhfIHUP8M>
  - *What is HIV* From Amaze.org (3.29 minutes) uses a game show true or false format to highlight facts and myths about HIV, and includes a short description of PrEP, a medication to lower the risk of contracting HIV. <https://amaze.org/video/what-is-hiv/>
  - *Living With HIV*. This Amaze.org video (3.10 minute) discusses how HIV is contracted and options that can help people live long and healthy lives just like people with other chronic diseases (such as diabetes). <https://amaze.org/video/living-with-hiv/>

## FACILITATOR NOTE

The information provided in the Sex, Etc. video is most aligned with the **STI Myth and Fact Quiz**. Students can still take the quiz in conjunction with any of the videos, just know that not all of the questions will be answered in every video. The quiz is a helpful tool to see what your students may already know and provide important facts about STIs. Use the **STI Myth and Fact Quiz Facilitator Key** to provide answers to the questions not answered in the videos.

## DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

Ask the following debriefing questions after viewing the video and taking the quiz.

1. **Have you heard of any of these myths before? What other STI myths could put people at risk of getting or spreading an STI?**

*Possible Answers*

- *The only people that get an STI are those who have multiple partners.*
- *If you take a bath or shower after sex, it will wash away any STIs.*

2. **Why is it important to separate the myths from the facts about STIs?**

*Possible Answers*

- *Myths can give you a false sense of security that it ‘won’t happen to me’.*
- *You may think that your behavior doesn’t put you at risk.*
- *You may not realize that condoms are effective at preventing STI.*
- *You may pass an STI to someone else without even knowing.*



## STI MYTH OR FACT QUIZ

There are many common myths about STIs, so it's important to get the facts. Test your knowledge by taking this quiz. Are these statements MYTH or FACT? Circle the correct answer.

1.	Using two condoms together provides double protection from STIs.	MYTH	FACT
2.	The best way to know if you have an STI is by having symptoms.	MYTH	FACT
3.	You can't easily get HIV from kissing.	MYTH	FACT
4.	Herpes can only be spread if sores are visible.	MYTH	FACT
5.	You can get STIs from oral sex.	MYTH	FACT
6.	Most STI testing is easy, pain-free and affordable.	MYTH	FACT
7.	You can't get an STI if you use a condom or oral dam.	MYTH	FACT
8.	You can catch STIs from using a public toilet.	MYTH	FACT
9.	If you have an STI and get treated you can't get that STI again.	MYTH	FACT
10.	Abstinence (not having oral, anal or vaginal sex) is the safest way to prevent STIs.	MYTH	FACT
11.	Being on a hormonal birth control method protects you from STIs.	MYTH	FACT
12.	Some STIs cannot be cured.	MYTH	FACT
13.	When you go to the doctor or a family planning clinic they automatically check you for STIs.	MYTH	FACT
14.	Polyurethane condoms are a safe and effective alternative method of protection for people who are allergic or sensitive to latex.	MYTH	FACT

**FACILITATOR KEY**
**STI MYTH OR FACT QUIZ**

There are many common myths about STIs, so it's important to get the facts. Test your knowledge by taking this quiz. Are these statements MYTH or FACT? Circle the correct answer.

1.	Using two condoms together provides double protection from STIs. <b>One condom at a time is all you need!</b>	MYTH	FACT
2.	The best way to know if you have an STI is by having symptoms. <b>Most STIs have no symptoms. The best way to know for sure is to get tested.</b>	MYTH	FACT
3.	You can't easily get HIV from kissing. <b>HIV is spread through blood, semen and vaginal fluids.</b>	MYTH	FACT
4.	Herpes can only be spread if sores are visible. <b>Herpes is most contagious when there are sores, but herpes can still be spread when they aren't visible on the skin.</b>	MYTH	FACT
5.	You can get STIs from oral sex. <b>Many STIs like chlamydia, herpes, HPV and syphilis can be spread through unprotected oral sex. Using condoms and oral dams during oral sex can effectively prevent STIs.</b>	MYTH	FACT
6.	Most STI testing is easy, pain-free and affordable. <b>Many standard STI tests are simply a urine test or a swab. Some STIs require a blood test. Testing is easy and affordable.</b>	MYTH	FACT
7.	You can't get an STI if you use a condom or oral dam. <b>Although condoms and oral dams provide excellent protection, some STIs can be spread through skin-to-skin contact in places on the body not covered by a condom or oral dam.</b>	MYTH	FACT
8.	You can catch STIs from using a public toilet. <b>STIs are spread through the exchange of bodily fluids and skin-to-skin contact.</b>	MYTH	FACT
9.	If you have an STI and get treated you can't get that STI again. <b>A person can get re-infected if they have sex with someone infected, even if they've been treated for an STI before.</b>	MYTH	FACT
10.	Abstinence (not having oral, anal or vaginal sex) is the safest way to prevent STIs. <b>While not having sex may be most effective, for people who are sexually active, condoms and oral dams are a very effective way to prevent STIs.</b>	MYTH	FACT
11.	Being on a hormonal birth control method protects you from STIs. <b>The pill does not provide a barrier, so bodily fluids are still exchanged during sex. People using a hormonal birth control method need to also use condoms or oral dams to prevent STIs.</b>	MYTH	FACT
12.	Some STIs cannot be cured. <b>Some STIs are viruses (HIV, Herpes, HPV, Hepatitis) that cannot be cured. However, they can be treated and managed.</b>	MYTH	FACT
13.	When you go to the doctor or a family planning clinic they automatically check you for STIs. <b>You will need to ask your medical provider for STI testing. STIs are not something they will test for automatically.</b>	MYTH	FACT
14.	Polyurethane condoms are a safe and effective alternative method of protection for people who are allergic or sensitive to latex. <b>Polyurethane condoms are just as effective as latex condoms. However, natural or lambskin condoms are only for pregnancy prevention because they are porous. Sperm can't pass through, but some STIs can.</b>	MYTH	FACT



## ACTIVITY 4C: STI SCAVENGER HUNT



Say,

Now that you have some basic facts about STIs, you will do your own research. Using reliable web sources will help you find answers to questions about STIs. You can use these websites to keep up with changes in the science around STI testing, treatment and prevention. This information is important for making informed decisions about your sexual health, whether you need the information now or maybe sometime in the future.



- Hand out a copy of the **STI Scavenger Hunt** and **Understanding HIV** worksheets to each student.
- These worksheets can be completed in class in small groups, or given to students as a homework assignment.
- Whether you give the activity as an in-class or homework assignment, take some time to review key facts and messages they discover while doing their research.

### ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

Ask students to create a 30-second commercial or public service announcement (PSA) about STIs, including key information they think their peers should know about STIs.

### DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

1. In your research, what is something new you learned about STIs?
2. What online resources did you find helpful?
3. What would you want people your age to know about STIs?
4. **Where can you get tested?** Provide information on STI testing resources in Maine.

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## STI INFORMATION AND SERVICES

Use these websites for both you and your students to find up to date, medically accurate information about STIs.

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/std/> and <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/>
- American Sexual Health Association: <http://www.ashasexualhealth.org/stdsstis/>

### Testing Resources in Maine:

- Most doctor's offices provide STI testing, although not automatically. If a provider does not bring up and encourage STI testing, it is important for young people to ask about and request these services if they are sexually active.

The following family planning providers offer confidential services to teens on a sliding fee scale:

- Maine Family Planning (207) 922-3222  
<https://mainefamilyplanning.org/our-services/>
- Planned Parenthood of Northern New England (866) 476-1321  
<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-northern-new-england>

The following sites offer HIV testing and case management for people living with HIV.

- Frannie Peabody, Portland (207) 749-6818, [peabodycenter.org](http://peabodycenter.org)
- Health Equity Alliance (HEAL) Bangor, Belfast, Ellsworth and Machais, (207) 990-3262, [mainehealthequity.org](http://mainehealthequity.org)
- St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, Lewiston (207) 777-8100
- MaineGeneral Horizon Program, Augusta (207) 621-3785
- Portland Public Health-India Street Clinic, Portland (207) 874-8446  
<https://www.portlandmaine.gov/399/India-Street-Public-Health-Center>



## ACTIVITY 4D: REFLECTION & CLOSURE



### REFLECTION

Have students respond to the following questions on a notecard or journaling option.

After learning more about STIs,

1. How might this information be useful for you either now or in the future?
2. How could you communicate with a partner around preventing STIs?
3. Who is someone in your life you could talk to about STI prevention and sexual health?

### CLOSURE

In closing the lesson, remind students of these key points:

- STIs are common and are nothing to be ashamed of.
- Many STIs have no symptoms. The only way to know if you have an STI is to get tested.
- Testing is easy, affordable and confidential at any family planning clinic, STI clinic, or doctor's office.
- The best way to prevent STIs is practicing abstinence or using a barrier method if you choose to have sex.
- Many people who live with incurable STIs, like Herpes and HIV, can continue to live healthy lives and be in intimate relationships.

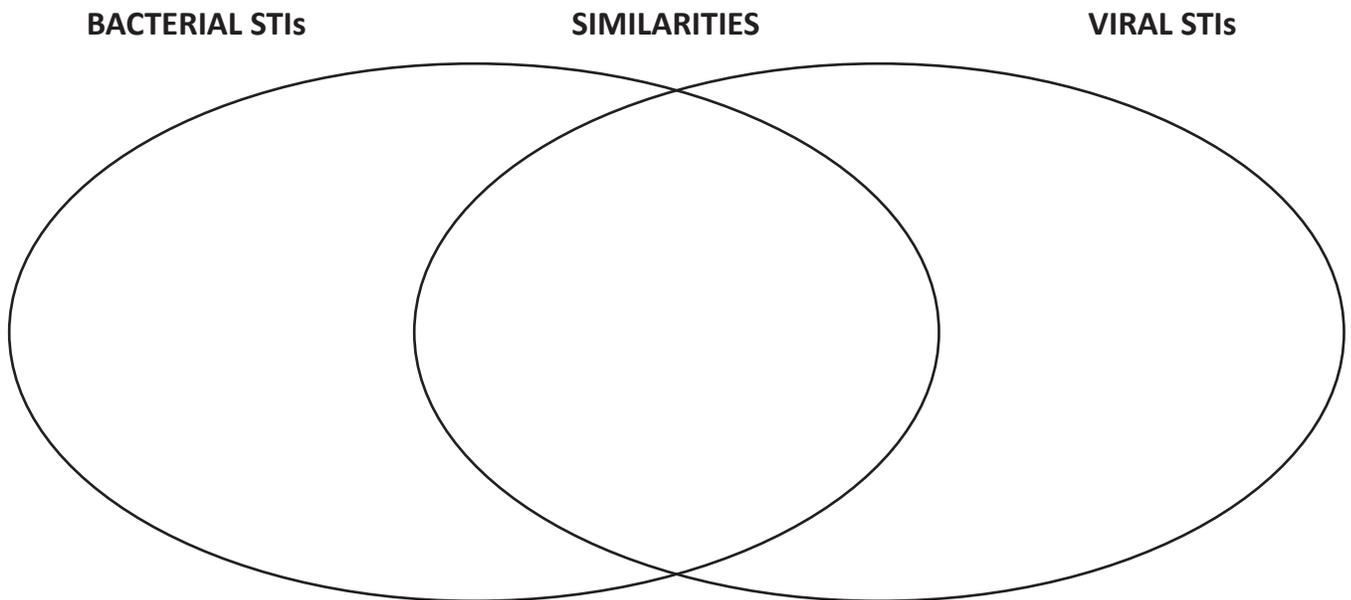
# Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

## Scavenger Hunt



**Instructions:** Find the answers to the following questions about STIs, using a reliable website, such as: [cdc.gov/std](http://cdc.gov/std) or [ashasexualhealth.org/stdsstis/](http://ashasexualhealth.org/stdsstis/).

1. What is the difference between Bacterial and Viral STIs? What are some similarities?



2. Give 3 examples of the most common bacterial STIs and 3 of the most common viral STIs.

Bacterial STIs	Viral STIs
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

3. What are some common symptoms of STIs?

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4. Name 3 effective ways a person can protect themselves and their partner(s) from STIs?

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5. Select one STI that interests you and answer the following questions:

Name of STI: \_\_\_\_\_

- How is it spread?
- How many cases of this STI are reported in the U.S. each year?
- How does someone know if they have it? What are common symptoms?
- How does one get tested for this STI?
- What can happen if this STI is left untreated?

6. If half of all new cases of STIs are found in people ages 15-24. Why do you think many people in this age group are not getting tested for STIs? Give 4 possible reasons.

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7. Now that you know more about STIs, what is one message you'd want to share with other people your age?

8. Where can someone get free barrier methods and STI testing in your community?

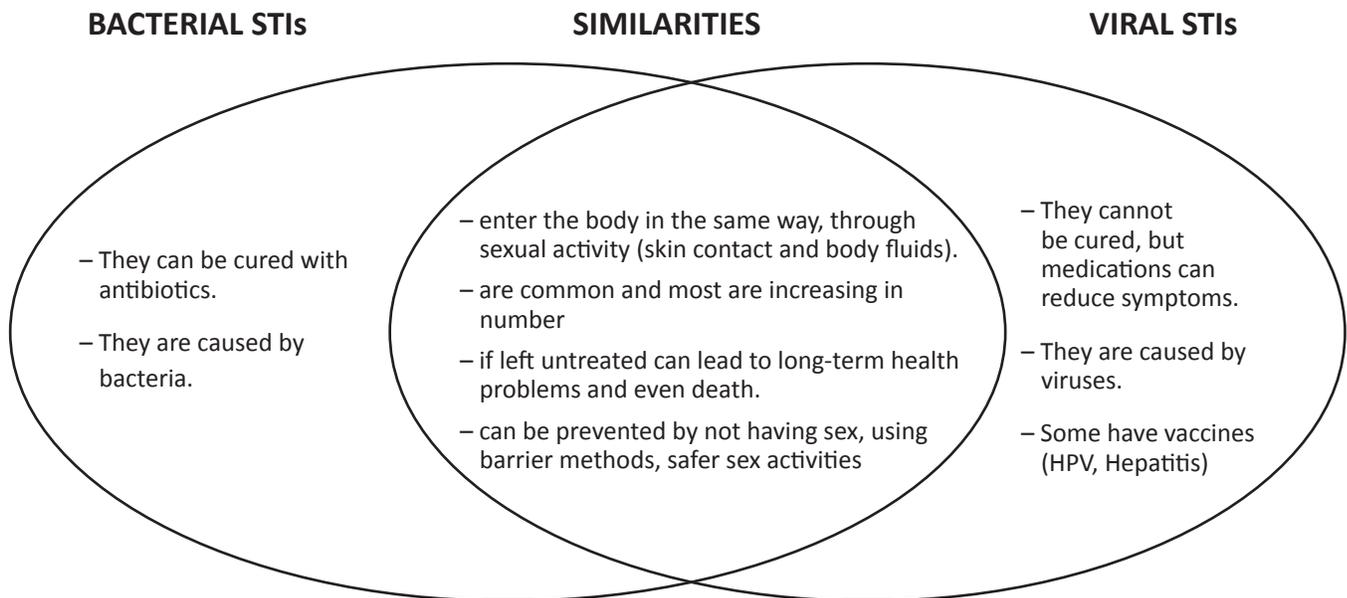
## FACILITATOR KEY

### Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) Scavenger Hunt



**Instructions:** Find the answers to the following questions about STIs, using a reliable website, such as: [cdc.gov/std](http://cdc.gov/std) or [ashasexualhealth.org/stdsstis/](http://ashasexualhealth.org/stdsstis/).

1. What is the difference between Bacterial and Viral STIs? What are some similarities?



2. Give 3 examples of the most common bacterial STIs and 3 of the most common viral STIs.

Bacterial STIs	Viral STIs
<p><i>List could include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>chlamydia</i></li> <li>– <i>gonorrhea</i></li> <li>– <i>syphilis</i></li> <li>– <i>(may include bacterial vaginosis, which can be spread by sex, but can occur on it's own)</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>List could include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>HIV</i></li> <li>– <i>herpes</i></li> <li>– <i>hepatitis b</i></li> <li>– <i>HPV (genital warts)</i></li> </ul>

3. What are some common symptoms of STIs?

*Possible answers:*

*Burning when urinating, unusual discharge from vagina or penis, sores/bumps/rashes in genitals, mouth or anus, many STIs have no symptoms.*

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**4. Name 3 effective ways a person can protect themselves and their partner(s) from STIs?**

*Possible answers:*

- *By not having sex.*
- *Using a barrier, like a condom or oral dam.*
- *Engage in sexual contact that doesn't exchange semen or vaginal fluid.*
- *Not sharing needles.*
- *Having fewer partners (especially when overlapping and not using barrier methods)*
- *Getting vaccinated from STIs that have vaccines.*
- *Partners get tested regularly and treated if they have an STI.*

**5. Select one STI that interests you and answer the following questions:**

**Name of STI:** *(answers will depend on the STI – see CDC for up-to-date information)*

- How is it spread?
- How many cases of this STI are reported in the U.S. each year?
- How does someone know if they have it? What are common symptoms?
- How does one get tested for this STI?
- What can happen if this STI is left untreated?

**6. If half of all new cases of STIs are found in people ages 15-24. Why do you think many people in this age group are not getting tested for STIs? Give 4 possible reasons.**

- *Don't have information about STIs.*
- *Don't think they can be at risk.*
- *Too embarrassed or feel shame/stigma around getting tested.*
- *Don't know where to go to get testing, or live too far from a clinic.*
- *Don't think they can afford it.*

**7. Now that you know more about STIs, what is one message you'd want to share with other people your age?**

*Answers may vary. May include: don't have sex, use a barrier method, get tested, etc.*

**8. Where can someone get free barrier methods and STI testing in your community?**

*Answers will vary. Find out where testing is available in the communities where your students live.*



## Understanding HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)



**Instructions:** Below are some questions specific to HIV. Research <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/> to find answers to the following information about HIV.

### 1. How is someone tested for HIV?

*Possible answers: An oral swab, finger prick or blood draw. Antibody tests using an oral swab or finger prick will show results within 20 minutes. Blood draws are sent to a lab so results take longer. There is a window period (often 3 months) between the possible HIV exposure and when an HIV antibody test will give you an accurate result.*

### 2. What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

*Possible answers: HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus and AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. While everyone who has AIDS also has HIV, not everyone who has HIV will develop AIDS. AIDS occurs when someone has a certain amount of the virus, HIV, in their blood and they develop infections that take advantage of a weak immune system. It is important for people who have HIV to take antiretroviral medications so that they do not develop AIDS.*

### 3. What is the difference between the HIV medications PEP and PrEP?

*Possible answers: PEP stands for Post Exposure Prophylaxis and PrEP stands for Pre Exposure Prophylaxis. PEP is a course of treatment someone take after a possible exposure to HIV to prevent contracting HIV. PrEP is a medication someone takes daily when they're at higher risk for HIV. This medication prevents contracting the virus before a possible exposure.*

### 4. What does the term U=U mean?

*Possible answers: U=U means undetectable=untransmittable.; this means that someone who has HIV who is taking antiretroviral medication as prescribed can get their viral load down to a point where it is undetectable in laboratory tests. People with undetectable levels of virus in their blood will not transmit HIV to others during sex.*

### 5. How have medical advancements changed how people today view and understand HIV?

*Possible answers: with advancements in medication and research that shows U=U, contracting HIV is no longer a death sentence and relieves some of the stigma that people living with HIV often face. Available medications such as PrEP and PEP help reduce fear for people who are at higher risk of contracting HIV. It is important to be aware of the medical advancements to reduce the stigma and risk associated with HIV.*

### 6. How is HIV similar and different from other sexually transmitted infections?

*Possible answers: : It can be contracted in the same way – through exchanging sexual fluids such as semen and vaginal secretions. It cannot be cured, but it can be treated just like the other viruses. If left untreated it is more deadly than other STIs and there is often more stigma around HIV than other STIs.*