

What's the Risk?

PURPOSE

As students gain knowledge about STIs and skills for using barrier methods, they also need to personalize their risk based on their own behaviors. By exploring a range of sexual behaviors and attitudes, students will identify those that can prevent STIs and those that can put them at risk and be able to use that knowledge to make healthy sexual decisions.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

1. Describe a range of behaviors that put someone at risk for STIs, including HIV.
2. Personalize their own risk of contracting an STI.
3. Identify ways to reduce the risk of transmitting/contracting STIs.

LESSON SUMMARY

Activities	Minutes	Materials and Preparation Checklist
A STI Transmission Mystery	15	<input type="checkbox"/> Copy and cut up the individual STI Mystery Character Cards (laminates, if possible). <input type="checkbox"/> Review the STI Transmission Mystery Facilitator Key . <input type="checkbox"/> Easel paper or white board and markers for drawing the transmission mystery diagram.
B STI Risk Continuum	35	<input type="checkbox"/> Copy the STI Risk Continuum cards (and laminate if possible). Tape the LEAST RISKY and MOST RISKY cards on the wall or board with room in between. <input type="checkbox"/> Copy one set of the Behavior & Attitude Cards (and laminate if possible). Prepare tape for students to post their cards along the continuum. <input type="checkbox"/> Review the STI Risk Continuum Facilitator Key .
C Reflection & Closure	10	<input type="checkbox"/> Copy What If? Reflection worksheet for each student for completion in class or as homework. <input type="checkbox"/> Supplemental Video – if using, allow for extra time and preview the video and debriefing questions in advance.



INTRODUCE THE LESSON

Say,

We've now learned about common STIs, how easily they can spread from person to person and ways to prevent STIs.

Recap previous learning by asking these three short review questions:

- **Can someone have an STI but not have any symptoms?**
Answer: Yes, many STIs do not have visible symptoms.
- **What is the only way to know for sure if you have an STI?**
Answer: By remaining abstinent (not having oral, anal or vaginal sex) and getting tested.
- **Where can you get tested?**
Answer: Most doctor's offices and family planning clinics provide STI testing.

Remember, that STIs are very common – half of sexually active people in the U.S. will experience an STI in their lifetime. That's why it is important not to judge or stigmatize people who get STIs and focus on ways to prevent them, including using barrier methods such as condoms and oral dams.

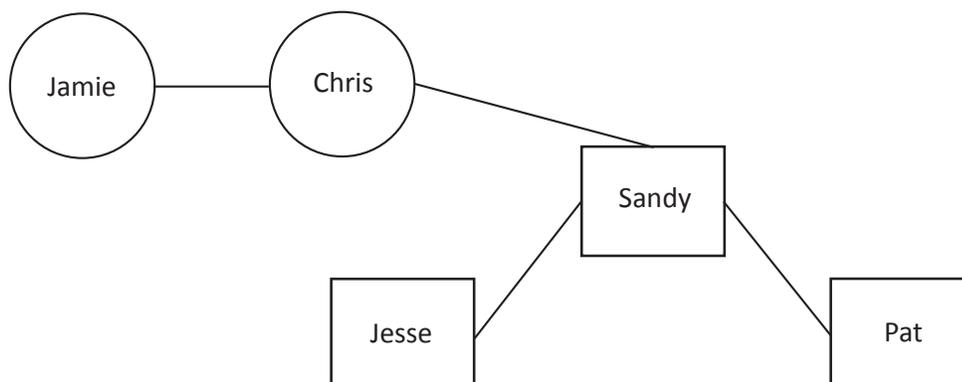


ACTIVITY 6A: STI TRANSMISSION MYSTERY



- Introduce the activity: **We're going to tell a story of two people in a relationship.**
- Ask for 5 volunteers to act out the characters. The character names are gender neutral, so your volunteers can play the part of any character.
- Hand out the corresponding **STI Mystery Character Cards** to each volunteer. Tell the students that they are actors and the character card they get is completely random.
- Remind the class that these volunteers are actors. Encourage the volunteers to use their acting skills to portray their character in any way they prefer.
- Have each volunteer read their card in order, starting with Jamie. Refer to the **STI Transmission Mystery Facilitator Key**.
- As the characters read their cards, draw two circles on the board or easel paper for Jamie and Chris. Then draw squares, adding the characters Sandy, Jesse and Pat as the volunteers read their stories. Draw a connecting line to each character that has engaged in sexual activity.

Here is a sample of how the diagram could look. You can follow along with the script below.



Character Card 1: Jamie

My name is **Jamie**. I've been dating **Chris** for several months now. Chris is the first person I've had sex with and Chris has only had one other partner before me. We talked about it and agreed we both wanted to have sex. We usually use protection, but not always. Last week, after hearing in health class about the importance of testing, I went to a family planning clinic. I just found out that I've tested positive for chlamydia!! I don't understand! Chris has only been with one other person and that was like a year ago. How could this have happened to me!?

Character Card 2: Chris

I'm **Chris** and I'm really into **Jamie**. We've been together for a few months now and started having sex recently. We know protection is important, but every once in a while, we just aren't prepared and don't use it. I haven't been that worried. Jamie has not had other partners, and I've only been with **Sandy**, but that was a long time ago. If I had an STI I'd have known by now. Then Jamie called me about testing positive for chlamydia! I'm not sure why—Sandy never had an STI and I'm pretty sure Jamie hasn't had sex with anyone but me.

Character Card 3: Sandy

My name is **Sandy** and I was in a relationship with **Chris** about a year ago. I've had other partners, but I didn't say anything because I didn't really think it was important for me to tell Chris about my past. It just felt awkward to bring it up and I didn't want to ruin the mood when we were together. Plus, our relationship was mostly physical and wasn't that serious anyway.

Character Card 4: Jesse

I'm **Jesse** and I've known **Sandy** for a long time. We aren't in a serious relationship; we just hook up and have sex once in a while. We never use protection because it would be awkward to bring it up. Plus, if I bring it up, Sandy might think I have an STI. We're just having fun so it's not really worth the trouble.

Character Card 5: Pat

I'm **Pat** and last year I was visiting some relatives over the holidays and was invited to a party at a friend's house. At the party I met **Sandy** and we hit it off. We both had a little too much to drink and ended up having sex. Neither one of us had protection. I didn't mention that I have a serious partner back home because this was just a random hook up.

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

After the story is completed, thank the volunteers for their acting, and ask them to sit down.

Say,

STIs are common, preventable and treatable. They can affect anyone who has unprotected sex. It is everyone's responsibility to get tested regularly and use a barrier every time they have sex.

Ask the following questions.

1. What are some of the reasons the characters did not use protection?

Possible answers:

- *They were in a monogamous relationship (not having sex with other people).*
- *They didn't want to ruin the mood.*
- *They felt awkward about talking to someone about using protection and testing.*
- *They were drinking.*
- *They thought the other person would assume they had an STI if they brought it up.*
- *Some of the situations were hook ups, so they didn't think it was important to bring up the topic.*

**2. Was affirmative consent present in the different situations between the characters?
Why or why not?**

Possible answers:

- *They were not being honest about their other relationships (they were not informed).*
- *They weren't communicating openly about what they wanted or checking in with the other person about what they wanted.*
- *In the situation between Pat and Sandy, they were drunk so didn't have affirmative consent.*

3. If the characters had taken a moment to pause, what could they have done to avoid getting or transmitting an STI?

Possible answers:

- *They could have not had sex or used a barrier method.*
- *They could have gone to a clinic for STI testing when they had a new partner or as part of their annual health care visit.*
- *They could have been more open and honest and talked about STI risk and protection with each other.*

Say,

Remember STIs are very common so it's important to discuss protection with a partner before having sex so you can both be safe. Remember that using a barrier method when having oral, vaginal and anal sex can greatly reduce the chance of getting STIs. Even when a partner is using a hormonal birth control method to prevent pregnancy, barrier methods like a condom or oral dam are still important for preventing STIs.

SUMMARIZE

In summarizing the activity, include these key points:

- It can be surprising when someone finds out they have an STI.
- It can also be awkward talking to a partner about having an STI.
- Ultimately, every person has the responsibility to keep themselves healthy.

They can do this by:

- Not engaging in sexual activity.
- Using barrier methods.
- Having conversations with their sexual partners.
- Knowing the risk of STIs.
- Getting tested annually or with each new partner.

STI Mystery Character Cards



CHARACTER CARD 1: JAMIE

My name is **Jamie**. I've been dating **Chris** for several months now. Chris is the first person I've had sex with and Chris has only had one other partner before me. We talked about it and agreed we both wanted to have sex. We usually use protection, but not always. Last week, after hearing in health class about the importance of testing, I went to a family planning clinic. I just found out that I've tested positive for chlamydia!! I don't understand! Chris has only been with one other person and that was like a year ago. How could this have happened to me!?

CHARACTER CARD 2: CHRIS

I'm **Chris** and I'm really into **Jamie**. We've been together for a few months now and started having sex recently. We know protection is important, but every once in a while, we just aren't prepared and don't use it. I haven't been that worried. Jamie has not had other partners, and I've only been with **Sandy**, but that was a long time ago. If I had an STI I'd have known by now. Then Jamie called me about testing positive for chlamydia! I'm not sure why—Sandy never had an STI and I'm pretty sure Jamie hasn't had sex with anyone but me.

STI Mystery Character Cards



CHARACTER CARD 3: SANDY

My name is **Sandy** and I was in a relationship with **Chris** about a year ago. I've had other partners, but I didn't say anything because I didn't really think it was important for me to tell Chris about my past. It just felt awkward to bring it up and I didn't want to ruin the mood when we were together. Plus, our relationship was mostly physical and wasn't that serious anyway.

CHARACTER CARD 4: JESSE

I'm **Jesse** and I've known **Sandy** for a long time. We aren't in a serious relationship; we just hook up and have sex once in a while. We never use protection because it would be awkward to bring it up. Plus, if I bring it up, Sandy might think I have an STI. We're just having fun so it's not really worth the trouble.

CHARACTER CARD 5: PAT

I'm **Pat** and last year I was visiting some relatives over the holidays and was invited to a party at a friend's house. At the party, I met **Sandy** and we hit it off. We both had a little too much to drink and ended up having sex. Neither one of us had protection. I didn't mention that I have a serious partner back home because this was just a random hook up.



ACTIVITY 6B: STI RISK CONTINUUM



Introduce this activity by saying:

It's important to know what behaviors put someone at risk for STIs, so they can decide what level of risk they are comfortable taking. It's also important for partners to communicate and make sure that affirmative consent is present for all sexual activities. Now we will look at some specific sexual behaviors and attitudes and their level of risk for STIs.

- Place the **LEAST RISKY** and **MOST RISKY** cards on the board with plenty of space in between.
- Explain the risk levels by saying:
MOST RISKY includes behaviors that allow STIs to be passed through bodily fluids (like semen, vaginal fluids or blood) or through skin-to-skin contact.
LEAST RISKY includes behaviors that pose little to no risk of passing an STI.
- Explain, **In addition to Behavior Cards, there are Attitude Cards. Attitudes can play a role in helping someone avoid or engage in risky behaviors.**
- Distribute an equal number of **Behavior and Attitude Cards** to groups of 2-4 students.
- Ask the small groups to discuss their card(s) and decide where they think they fit along the continuum between **LEAST RISKY** to **MOST RISKY** for transmitting STIs. If they are unsure where to place their card(s), it's okay to guess – they are all learning together.
- Have students place their cards along the continuum. They can do this on their own timing, or you can ask them to wait until you call on them to place their cards on the wall/board.
- Once the group has placed their cards on the continuum, you can either read the cards aloud to the class, or ask each group to read their cards and explain their placement.
- With each card you review, ask if students agree with the placements, or if they want to move the card(s) to a different place along the continuum. This process may spark discussion about how one behavior may lead to another behavior that may put someone at higher risk. Ask students to focus on the specific behavior or attitude written on the card. You can add cards if students bring up behaviors or attitudes not included.
- Review the **Behavior and Attitude Cards** on the continuum, as time allows, using the **Risk Continuum Facilitator Key** to reinforce or correct student responses.

FACILITATOR NOTE

Remind students that the key to protection is not exchanging semen, vaginal fluid or blood with an infected person. Some STIs, like herpes and HPV/genital warts can also be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact. The placement of the cards does not have to be exact along the continuum. The point of the activity is to discuss how some behaviors and attitudes may present more risk and to identify ways to lessen the risk.

DEBRIEF THE ACTIVITY

After you have completed the **Risk Continuum**, debrief by asking the following questions:

1. What does this activity tell you about behaviors and attitudes that put people at risk for STIs and HIV?

Possible answers:

- *There is a range of sexual behaviors that can transmit or prevent STIs.*
- *Both behaviors and attitudes can increase or decrease someone's risk.*
- *There are behaviors and ways to be intimate that are less risky than others for spreading STIs.*

2. What is the best way to prevent STIs and HIV?

Possible answers:

- *Not having vaginal, anal or oral sex.*
- *Not sharing needles.*
- *Use a barrier method with oral, vaginal and anal sex.*
- *If sexually active, get tested annually or with each new partner.*

3. Some behaviors that are less risky might lead to other behaviors that are more risky. What are some things a person can do to engage in activities that are less risky?

Possible answers:

- *Pause to slow things down.*
- *Talk with a partner ahead of time about what you are comfortable doing and how you will prevent STIs.*
- *Always have barrier methods available and use them to reduce risk.*
- *Find ways to be intimate that do not involve exchanging bodily fluids..*

4. What role does affirmative consent play in someone's risk for STIs?

Possible answers:

- *If partners are not checking for consent, they may engage in behaviors that may be higher risk for STIs.*
- *Affirmative consent includes engaging in sexual activity that is informed, does not include pressure or manipulation and takes place without being intoxicated.*
- *Affirmative consent requires communication, which can lead to engaging in less risky behaviors.*

SUMMARIZE

In summarizing the activity, include these key points:

- Identifying the level of risk involved with certain behaviors can help someone identify what they are most comfortable doing sexually.
- Both behaviors and attitudes play a role in helping prevent STIs or putting someone at risk for STIs.
- STIs are common. In fact, half of all people who are sexually active will get an STI at some point in their life. When we destigmatize (lessen the shame) around STIs, we can be more open to discussing risk and prevention.
- Taking time to pause allows partners to talk things through, check that consent is present and engage in activities that put them at less risk for STIs.



ACTIVITY 6C: REFLECTION & CLOSURE



REFLECTION



This activity provides an opportunity for students to reflect on how they might respond to STIs in their own life.

Pass out a copy of the **What If? Reflection** worksheet to each student. Ask the students to answer the questions privately. This worksheet can also be given as homework.

If you have time, you can choose to debrief the **What If? Reflection** by asking students:

1. What was it like to answer those questions?
2. Were some questions more difficult to answer than others? If yes, what made some questions more difficult?
3. What are key messages you would apply to your life, or you would tell others, around having an STI?

CLOSURE

Close the lesson by making the following points:

- Many people who are sexually active are infected with STIs every year. Even though some STIs can be cured and others cannot, all STIs can be treated and managed.
- Even if you are not sexually active, it's important to know how to prevent STIs. This information can be important in the future, or to share with others to reduce the spread and stigma of STIs.
- If you are sexually active, it is important to:
 - ◆ Get tested annually and with each new partner.
 - ◆ Use a barrier method every time you have sex.
 - ◆ Talk with your partner(s) about STIs.

SUPPLEMENTAL VIDEO



You will need extra time to show this video, or you can assign it as a homework activity.

About the video: This 8-minute video from Planned Parenthood has three scenarios depicting couples communicating about an STI diagnosis. The video shows some intimate sexual situations, so you should view it first, and decide if it is appropriate for your students and setting.

Follow the link below or search for Planned Parenthood’s YouTube video:

How to Tell Someone you have an STD

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxV7CiE2Bwc&list=PL3xP1jlf1jgLGmP1DI6w_XoQOpYs7ad_-&index=3

Additional videos, such as how to talk about safer sex and STI testing and screening, go to:

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/for-educators/digital-tools>

You can use the following questions to process the videos.

1. What are some ways a person can ask or tell their partner they have an STI?

Possible Answers:

- *Face-to-face or over the phone, through texting, or by using a trusted, anonymous notification website or app.*
- *A person may feel more comfortable or safer using a text. The person may not know the person(s) they had sex with very well or may feel unsafe.*
- *In Maine, for some types of STIs, there are Specialists at the Maine CDC who will contact partners, without using names to protect confidentiality, to let them know they may have been infected.*
- *The bottom line is that it is important to let sexual partners know so they can get treated and not spread the STI to other people.*

2. Does having an STI mean someone cannot be in a sexual relationship?

Possible Answers:

People with a viral STI that cannot be cured (like Herpes or HIV) can still be in sexual relationships. It is important they talk with their health care provider about ways they can keep themselves and their partners safe and healthy. It is the responsibility of the person with the STI to let their sexual partners know so they can be informed and able to discuss their options in the relationship.

**LEAST
RISKY**

**MOST
RISKY**

**Having vaginal, anal
or oral sex without a
condom or oral dam**

**Having vaginal, anal
or oral sex with a
condom or oral dam**

**Using water-based
lube with a condom
during vaginal
or anal sex**

Kissing

Abstaining from sex

Touching with hands

**Sharing needles
for injecting drugs,
tattooing or
piercings**

**Always using a
barrier method and
having sex with
only one person**

Having multiple or overlapping partners

**Getting tested for
STIs regularly**

Using substances before having sex

**Always having
barrier methods
with you
(being prepared)**

**Feeling pressured, or
pressuring someone,
to have sex**

**Thinking that
you're not at risk**

**Refusing to use
barrier methods
when having sex**

**Not feeling
comfortable talking
to your partner
about your
boundaries or
using protection**

**Believing it is only
your partner's
responsibility to
use protection**

**Being confident
about taking care
of your health**

Caring about your partner's well-being

**Believing you are
STI-free because
your partner
was tested**

**Taking time to
PAUSE
rather than
rushing into sex**

**Taking PREP to
reduce the risk of
contracting HIV**

FACILITATOR KEY
RISK CONTINUUM

Behavior and Attitudes	Risk Level	Explanation
Having vaginal, anal, or oral sex <u>without</u> a condom or oral dam	MOST RISKY	Vaginal and oral sex without a barrier can place you at risk for STIs. Because the anus is not self-lubricating, it is riskier than vaginal sex. The <u>receiving</u> partner is at more risk. The vagina and anus are more susceptible to tearing during sex which can allow an STI to enter the body. Oral sex can pass herpes from mouth to genitals, or genitals to mouth, and some STIs like gonorrhea can infect the throat.
Sharing needles for injecting drugs, tattooing or piercings	MOST RISKY	Sharing needles places you at high risk for STIs/HIV. Blood infected with HIV or other viruses like Hepatitis B and C can be directly transmitted into your blood stream by sharing needles.
Having multiple or overlapping partners	MOST RISKY	The more sex partners a person has, the greater their chances of contracting HIV or another STI.
Using substances before having sex	MOST RISKY	Using drugs or alcohol changes the way your body and brain work. It's more difficult to stick with sexual boundaries, use condoms correctly and avoid unsafe situations when drunk or high.
Feeling pressured or pressuring someone to have sex	MOST RISKY	Affirmative consent allows partners to respect boundaries so that no one is feeling pressured to engage in sexual activities. When sex takes place under pressure, people may not be prepared or able to protect themselves and their partners from STIs.
Thinking that you're not at risk	MOST RISKY	If you don't know how STIs are transmitted, you might engage in behaviors that put you at risk. If you don't know the sexual behaviors that spread STIs, you may not be prepared with the protection you need to prevent them.
Not feeling comfortable talking to your partner about your boundaries or using protection	MOST RISKY	Some people find talking about sex uncomfortable, but talking with your partner is the only way you can let them know your boundaries and together make decisions to avoid STIs and pregnancy. Your partner should be glad you brought it up!
Refusing to use barrier methods when having sex	MOST RISKY	If you are having oral, anal or vaginal sex without a condom or oral dam you are at risk.
Believing it is only your partner's responsibility to use protection	MOST RISKY	You are ultimately responsible for your sexual health decisions. Both partners in a sexual relationship should take the responsibility to make sure they have and use protection to prevent STIs and pregnancy.
Believing you are STI- free because your partner was tested	MOST RISKY	Just because someone says they've been tested doesn't mean you don't have an STI. The only way to know for sure is to get tested too!
Having vaginal, anal or oral sex <u>with</u> a condom or oral dam	LEAST RISKY	Condoms are very effective at preventing both STIs and pregnancy. When using barrier methods, oral sex is lower risk for STIs than vaginal sex. Barrier methods are also effective protection for spreading STIs through anal sex.
Using water-based lube with a condom during vaginal or anal sex	LEAST RISKY	Using water-based lubricant not only increases pleasure, but also helps prevent condoms from breaking. The membranes of the vagina and anus are susceptible to tearing during sex. This can allow an STI virus or bacteria to enter the body. Water-based lube helps prevent this tearing.

Behavior and Attitudes	Risk Level	Explanation
Kissing	LEAST RISKY	There is a small chance some STIs can spread if blood is exchange during deep kissing or if both partners have bleeding gums or sores. But generally STIs are not spread through saliva. If herpes is present in the mouth, it can be spread through kissing.
Taking time to pause rather than rushing into sex	LEAST RISKY	Taking time to pause can give you time to think about the situation and be prepared with protection. Allow your brain enough time to think about the risks and consequences so you can make healthy decisions that are right for you.
Always using a barrier method & having sex with only one person	LEAST RISKY	Using a barrier method and having sex with only one person greatly reduces the chance of getting an STI. Both partners should be tested for STIs when starting a new relationship.
Getting tested for STIs regularly	LEAST RISKY	Getting tested regularly will lower your chances for transmitting an STI to your partner. Many STIs are curable and all are treatable. Know your status!
Always having barrier methods with you (being prepared)	LEAST RISKY	Always having protection doesn't mean you are always ready to have sex. It means you are always ready to protect yourself and a partner from STIs and unintended pregnancy if you do have sex.
Abstaining from Sex	LEAST RISKY	Abstinence--not engaging in oral, anal, or vaginal sex--is the most effective way to avoid STIs. It's also important to educate yourself about barrier methods as a back-up in case you change your mind about being abstinent.
Touching with hands	LEAST RISKY	Touching or rubbing does not put you at risk of an STI. Some STIs, like HPV and Herpes, can be passed through skin- to-skin contact. Fingernails can also tear soft tissue in the vagina or anus which may allow STIs into the body, however it is generally very low risk.
Being confident about taking care of your health	LEAST RISKY	If you are confident in taking care of your health, you are aware of actions that could be helpful or unsafe. It is important to be a strong advocate for yourself in taking care of your health.
Caring about your partner's well- being	LEAST RISKY	When you consider how your actions might contribute to someone's emotional, physical, or sexual health, you are caring for both you and your partner's well-being.
Taking PrEP to reduce the risk of contracting HIV	LEAST RISKY	Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is a daily pill that reduces your risk of contracting HIV. PrEP is an valuable tool for people who are most at risk of contracting HIV. PrEP is up to 99% effective at preventing the contraction of HIV when taken consistently and as prescribed. PrEP does not prevent other STIs or pregnancy and therefore should still be used with condoms. For more information, visit https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics .