

# STD Prevention and Education for Women

## Where can I learn more?

Go to [knowmystatus.org](https://knowmystatus.org) to learn more about STDs and to find out where to go for testing, support, and treatment in Texas.

General STD information from DSHS:

[dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/info/](https://dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/info/)

For STD testing locations in Texas, call:

**2-1-1**



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

Texas Department of State  
Health Services

For HIV/STD questions, call  
800-CDC-INFO (English/Español)  
888-232-6348 (TTY).

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**TEXAS**  
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## Am I more at risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease (STD) than a man?

You have a higher risk of contracting an STD than a man. The structure of the vulvar, vaginal, and rectal tissues and how they connect to the urethra, cervix, uterus, and ovaries increases your risk.

## How do I know if I have an STD?

You may have an STD if you have:

- Sores, rashes, blisters, bumps, or irritation in or around your genital area, anus, or mouth,
- Pain or discomfort in your lower back or stomach,
- Pain or discomfort while urinating,
- Discharge or bleeding between periods, or
- Fever, headache, fatigue, nausea, or swollen lymph nodes.

Many people with STDs do not have symptoms and may not know they have an STD. The only sure way to know if you have an STD is to get tested.

## If I do not have anal or vaginal sex, will I be safe from STDs?

Some STDs can pass from person to person through physical contact with open sores or rashes. So, if you do not use protection during any intimate contact, you risk getting or passing an STD, even if you do not have anal or vaginal sex with your partner.

## Will STDs affect my chances of getting pregnant?

In their early stages, some STDs cause pain and discomfort during sex, which can make it difficult for you to become pregnant.

If left untreated, certain STDs like chlamydia and gonorrhea can damage your reproductive organs. Scarring caused by long-term damage can cause infertility.

STDs like human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), human papillomavirus (HPV), and hepatitis B can cause cancer. Cancer treatments can damage your uterus and ovaries, lead to early menopause, or require removal of the affected organs.

## I am currently pregnant. Can I still get STDs?

Pregnancy does not prevent STDs. If you have unprotected sex or share needles while pregnant, you can still get an STD.

STDs can then pass from you to your baby at any point during pregnancy, childbirth, and, in some cases, while breastfeeding.

## How will STDs affect my pregnancy?

Many STDs can have a severe negative effect on your pregnancy and the health of your baby. Left untreated, some STDs can cause:

- Miscarriages
- Stillbirths
- Preterm birth
- Birth defects
- Serious bacterial infections
- Low birth weight

Due to the severity of these complications, your doctor will test you throughout your pregnancy to make sure you do not have any STDs. Testing occurs at the first prenatal visit, during the third trimester, and during childbirth.

If you test positive for an STD during your pregnancy, your doctor will work with you on a treatment plan that is safe for you and your baby.

## I am currently on birth control. Do I still need to use condoms during sex?

You still need to use condoms if you take birth control. Birth control pills, intrauterine devices (IUDs), sponges, shots, and other forms of birth control do not protect you from STDs.

## How can I protect myself from STDs?

You can protect yourself from getting an STD by doing the following:

- Ask your doctor about STD screening and testing during your checkup(s).
- Get vaccinated for viral STDs like hepatitis B and HPV.
- Use condoms every time you have sex.
- Have sex with one partner who only has sex with you.
- If you regularly have unprotected sex with multiple partners, retest for STDs at least every three to six months.
- Do not share needles or syringes when injecting drugs.
- Ask your doctor about preventative and emergency medications, such as:
  - ▶ Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Taking PrEP regularly can help prevent you from catching HIV. If you have an STD, you are at a higher risk of getting HIV.
  - ▶ Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). Taking PEP within 72 hours of exposure to HIV can reduce your risk of getting HIV.
  - ▶ Doxycycline PEP (doxy PEP). Taking doxy PEP within 72 hours of exposure to bacterial STDs can prevent you from getting a bacterial STD.

The only sure way to prevent the spread of STDs is not to have sex or inject drugs.