

## The 411 on STDs and Teens

Here's the deal.....

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are very real and unfortunately do happen to a lot of teens. You'd probably be surprised to learn how many people you know in school that have an STD or who will get one during their teen years.

Even worse, some risky behaviours that are practiced when you're a teen can show up years later and cause a life threatening illness. HIV/AIDS is what we're talking about. Many adults in their twenties or thirties got HIV when they were teens, but didn't find out until they were older. It can take HIV as long as 10 years to show up, even though you've had it all along.

So what does all this mean? It means teens have to be very careful and learn all about STDs and how to protect themselves. Knowledge is your best protection. Many STDs do not have any warning signs until it's too late and permanent damage is done. And you can't tell if someone has an STD just by looking at them. So read up!

### Getting the Facts....

Every year 3 million teens--about one in four sexually experienced teens--become infected with a **sexually transmitted disease** (STD).

(The Alan Guttmacher Institute 1998 "Facts in Brief: Teen Sex and Pregnancy". available: <http://www.agi-usa.org/>. [Accessed 1999, November 11.]

**Gonorrhoea** and **chlamydia** are very common among adolescents and young adults for a few reasons:

1. This age group is more likely to have many sex partners.
2. This age group is more likely to have unprotected sexual intercourse.
3. **Biologically, young women are more likely to get these infections due to the cell makeup in the cervix.**

(State of Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene/AIDS Administration. Maryland HIV/AIDS Update: Summer 98.)

·Like chlamydia and gonorrhoea, teens and young adults have the highest rates of **syphilis** in the U.S. Syphilis affects more people between the ages of 15 and 30 than among any other age group. It also affects people with many sex partners.

(World Health Organization. December 1997 Fact Sheet. available: <http://www.who.ch/>.)

Condoms do not offer protection against all STDs. For example, HPV (human papilloma virus) is the virus that causes genital warts. HPV can be found on the dry skin surrounding the groin and stomach. A condom does not protect this area, which means a person could still become infected with HPV. Once infected with HPV, the virus can move from those areas to the vagina and cervix.

(The Youth Connection. May/June 1999. "News & Trends.")

Alcohol and drugs can make people do things they normally would not do which may increase their risk of STDs. Adolescent females who used alcohol were 70 percent more likely to have had several sex partners in the past three months than those who did not use alcohol. Similarly, males who used alcohol were 60 percent more likely to have multiple sexual partners.

(The Youth Connection. May/June 1999. "News & Trends.")

*Reprinted from, "Campaign for our Children, Inc."*

Between dealing with schoolwork, parents, teachers and trying to understand yourself, do you really want the headache of worrying about STDs too? Abstinence is still the best protection from sexually transmitted diseases – try it. It works!

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