

Resources for Youth on STD

There is a wealth of resources in L.A. County for young people to maintain their sexual health: [information](#), new tests, free and low-cost [clinics](#), easy ways to [tell your partners](#) about an STD, and effective vaccines for hepatitis A and B. But young people under the age of 25 have the highest rates, and are at the highest risk, for most STDs. In 2006, there were more than 24,000 cases of [chlamydia](#) and more than 5,000 cases of [gonorrhea](#) among youth ages 15-24 in L.A. County. The risk for youth for other STDs, like [herpes](#) and [HPV](#) (the virus that causes genital warts) is also very high. In fact, it's estimated that one in four young women in the U.S. ages 14-19 is infected with at least one common STD, including herpes, HPV, chlamydia and [trich](#) (trichomoniasis).

If you think you have an STD or find out someone you had sex with has an STD, get checked and treated right away. Also get checked if you notice any unusual symptoms, like burning when you pee, rashes, bumps, lumps, or pain in the genital or groin area. You can find a clinic near you by calling the STD Hotline at 1-800-758-0880, or visiting our [clinics](#) section or [inSPOTLA.org](#).

Many STDs often have no symptoms – until they lead to more serious problems or complications. So if you have a new sex partner, talk with him or her about both of you getting checked – there are many free STD testing locations throughout the L.A. area.

If you have an STD, you need to let your sex partner know. That way, he or she can get treated, and it also helps stop the spread of the STD back to you, or to someone else. If you don't want to talk to your partner directly, you can send her an e-card (anonymously if you wish) at [inSPOTLA.org](#).

Tips for Youth to Stay Sexually Healthy

Know you can consent for your own STD testing and care, and get your own birth control. In California, if you're 12 years old or older, you can get tested and treated for STDs or HIV without your parents' permission, and without them even knowing. And anyone, no matter what age you are, can get birth control without their parents' permission, it's the law! [Find out more here.](#)

Know about STDs. STDs are transmitted through direct sexual contact, including vaginal, anal, and oral sex, and some (like syphilis or herpes) can be transmitted through the vigorous skin-to-skin rubbing that takes place during sex.

Use condoms. If you're sexually active, using [condoms](#) every time you have sex is still your best protection against HIV and other STDs. There are more condom choices now than ever before, including different shapes, and condoms made of latex or polyurethane – learn what you like. There's also a condom for women (called the Female Condom) that goes inside the vagina. Some people (including guys) like this condom because they say it feels better. For any condom, use plenty of lube (water-based lube only for latex condoms), which can reduce any chance the condom will break or tear. For oral sex on a guy, there are flavored condoms, and for oral sex on a woman you can use plastic wrap, or cut a condom at the tip and then lengthwise and place it over the vagina.

If you're having sex, get an STD check-up at least once a year, and right away if you have symptoms, or your partner has an STD. Again, you can find a free or low-cost clinic near you by calling the STD Hotline at 1-800-758-0880, or visiting our [clinics](#) section or [inSPOTLA.org](#).

Know your body. If you notice unusual rashes, bumps, lumps, discharges, sores, or pain, don't just wait for them to go away – go get them checked out! But often, STDs don't cause any symptoms at first. They can still cause serious health problems later, like not being able to have children, serious damage to your organs,

and even cancer. There are dozens of [clinics](#) in the L.A. area where you can get free or low-cost STD testing. If you don't have health insurance, or have a limited income (including if you live with your parents) you may also qualify for [Family PACT](#), a California program that can offer you free birth control and STD testing.

[Talk to your partner.](#) Not talking about STDs doesn't make them go away. It's your body. Talk to your partner. It's also important to remember that STDs often have no symptoms – so your partner might think he or she's "clean" but still be able to give you an STD. And you might also think you're STD-free, but still have an infection you could give to your partner. If you or your partner find out either of you have an STD, the main thing is that both of you get treated, so you don't keep passing the STD back and forth to each other.

Know about partner therapy. If you have chlamydia or gonorrhea, it's always good for your partner to go get checked. But it's also possible to get medication from your doctor to give to your partner right away. Ask your doctor.

Know about cervical cancer prevention and HPV vaccine. New vaccines are available free for young women to prevent types of HPV (human papillomavirus) that can cause cervical cancer – a common cancer that affects women.

Know about Emergency Contraception (EC). If you didn't use birth control or something happened (like a condom broke or you forgot to take your birth control pills) so you think you might get pregnant, you can get emergency contraception. If you have [Family PACT](#) you can get EC for free. You can also get EC from several L.A. County agencies or from your pharmacist – check [here](#).

Know the HIV-STD connection. If you're HIV-negative and have an STD like syphilis or gonorrhea, you are two to five times more likely to become HIV infected if you have unprotected sex with an HIV-positive partner. If you're HIV-positive and have an STD, it's easier for you to transmit HIV to a negative partner.

If you or your partner have herpes, learn about suppressive therapy. Daily medication can reduce the number herpes outbreaks. It can also reduce the amount of herpes virus that is shed through the skin between outbreaks, which may in turn reduce the chance of transmitting herpes to sex partners. Visit [ASHASTD](#) for more information, or talk to your doctor to see if this therapy is right for your situation.

Make sure you've been vaccinated against hepatitis A and B. Hepatitis A and B are serious diseases that can cause illness for weeks or months. Hepatitis B can also cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death. Youth under age 18 can get free vaccine (but do need their parents' consent for this). Free vaccine is available -- call the STD hotline 1-800-758-0880.

Using drugs and alcohol increases your STD and HIV risk. Alcohol and drugs increase your risk for STDs when they increase the number of partners you have, or reduce your use of condoms. If you use alcohol or drugs, having condoms available and ready increases your chances of using them while under the influence. If your drug or alcohol use is out of control, find local treatment and recovery resources by calling 1-800-564-6600.