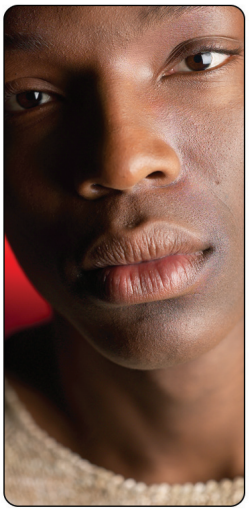
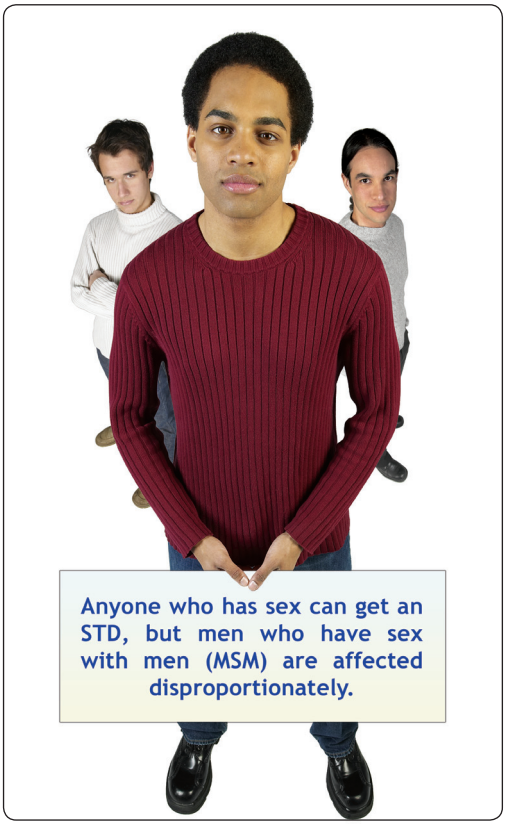
What Gay, Bisexual and Other Men Who Have Sex with Men Need to Know About Sexually Transmitted Diseases



If you choose to have sex, you need to know how to protect yourself against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).



What are sexually transmitted diseases?

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are very common in the United States—half of all sexually active people will get an STD by age 25. These diseases can be passed from one person to another through intimate physical contact and sexual activity.

Am I at risk for STDs?

While anyone who has sex can get an STD, sexually active gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are at greater risk. In addition to having higher rates of syphilis, more than half of all new HIV infections occur among MSM. Many factors contribute to the higher rates of STDs among MSM:

- Higher rates of HIV and STDs among MSM increase a person's risk of coming into contact with an infected partner and becoming infected themselves.
- Certain behaviors- such as not using condoms regularly and having anal sex - increase STD risk.
- Homophobia, stigma, and discrimination can negatively influence the health of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men.

How are STDs spread?

STDs are spread through sexual contact with someone who has an STD. Sexual contact includes oral, anal, and vaginal sex, as well as genital skin-to-skin contact.

Some STDs—like HIV, chlamydia and gonorrhea—are spread through sexual fluids, like semen. Other STDs, including HIV and hepatitis B, are also spread through blood. Genital herpes, syphilis, and human papillomavirus (HPV) are most often spread through genital skin-to-skin contact.

How will I know if I have an STD?

Most STDs have no signs or symptoms, so you (or your partner) could be infected and not know it. The only way to know your STD status is to get tested (you can search for a clinic at http://hivtest.cdc.gov/). Having an STD such as herpes makes it easier to get HIV, so it's important to get tested to protect your health and the health of your partner. CDC recommends sexually active gay, bisexual and other MSM test for:

- HIV at least once a year;
- Syphilis;
- Hepatitis B and C;
- Chlamydia and gonorrhea of the rectum if you've had receptive anal sex, or been a "bottom" in the past year;
- Chlamydia and gonorrhea of the penis (urethra) if you have had insertive anal or oral sex in the past year;
- Gonorrhea of the throat if you've received oral sex in the past year;
- And sometimes your healthcare provider may suggest a herpes test.

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Division of STD Prevention

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Your healthcare provider can offer you the best care if you discuss your sexual history openly. You should have a provider you are comfortable with. CDC's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health Services (http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/health-services.htm) page will help you find health services that are gay-friendly.

Can STDs be treated?

Some STDs (like gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis) can be cured with medication. If you are ever treated for an STD, be sure to finish all of your medicine, even if you feel better. Your partner should be tested and treated, too. It is important to remember that you are at risk for the same or a new STD every time you have unprotected sex (not using a condom) and/or have sex with someone who has an STD.

Other STDs like herpes and HIV cannot be cured, but medicines can be prescribed to manage symptoms.

How can I protect myself?

For anyone, choosing to be sexually active means you are at risk for STDs. However, there are many things you can do to protect your health. You can learn about how STDs are spread and how you can reduce your risk of getting infected.

Get Vaccinated: Gay, bisexual and other MSM are at greater risk for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and the human papillomavirus (HPV). For this reason, CDC recommends that you be vaccinated against hepatitis A and hepatitis B. The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine is also recommended for men up to age 26.

Be Safer: Getting tested regularly and getting vaccinated are both important, but there are other things you can do to reduce your risk for STDs.

- Get to know someone before having sex with them and talk honestly about STDs and getting tested—before you have sex.
- Use a condom correctly and use one every time you have sex.
- Think twice about mixing alcohol and/or recreational drugs with sex. They can reduce your ability to make good decisions and can lead to risky behavior—like having sex without a condom.
- Limit your number of partners. You can lower your risk for STDs if you only have sex with one person who only has sex with you.

Know Your Status: If you know your STD status, you can take steps to protect yourself and your partners.

References:

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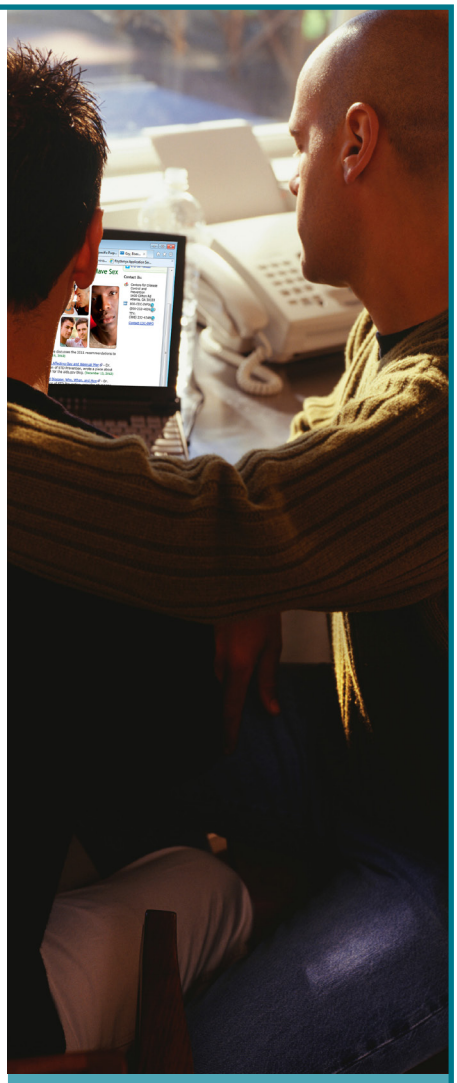

Where can I get more information?

CDC's Gay and Bisexual Men's Health page - Information for gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men http://www.cdc.gov/msmhealth/

Ten Things Gay Men Should Discuss with Their Healthcare Provider - Fact sheet from GLMA http://www.glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=690

Fenway Health - Safer sex information from Fenway Health http://www.fenwayhealth.org/

The GLBT National Help Center - GLBT support and referrals http://www.glnh.org/

AIDS.gov - HIV/AIDS information and resources from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services