

# STD/STI OVERVIEW

FOR PATIENTS

Be aware and be prepared.

## WHAT ARE STDs/STIs?

- ▶ Sexually transmitted diseases/infections (**STDs/STIs**) are infections that are spread from one person to another **during vaginal, anal, and/or oral sex**.
- ▶ STDs/STIs are **very common**—millions of new infections occur every year in the U.S.
- ▶ STDs/STIs are **preventable**, and most are **treatable**.
- ▶ It is possible **to have** an STD/STI and **not have any symptoms**.

Here are some you might have heard of:

- |                                      |                              |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ▶ Chlamydia                          | ▶ Human papillomavirus (HPV) |
| ▶ Gonorrhea                          | ▶ Bacterial vaginosis (BV)   |
| ▶ Hepatitis                          | ▶ Trichomoniasis             |
| ▶ Genital herpes                     | ▶ Syphilis                   |
| ▶ Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) | ▶ Scabies and pubic lice     |

## HOW DO THEY SPREAD?

- ▶ Most STDs/STIs are spread between sexual partners through **oral, vaginal, or anal sex** when bodily fluids, including blood, semen, and vaginal fluids are exchanged.
- ▶ Some STDs/STIs, such as herpes and HPV, are spread through **skin-to-skin contact**.
- ▶ Some STDs/STIs, like herpes, can also be spread through **kissing** and **intimate touching**.

## CAN THEY BE CURED?

- ▶ **Bacterial STDs/STIs** can be cured with antibiotics. These include:
  - ♦ Chlamydia
  - ♦ Gonorrhea
  - ♦ Syphilis
- ▶ While **viral STDs/STIs** cannot be cured, some, like HPV, are preventable with vaccination, and all can be managed with medications. These include:
  - ♦ HIV
  - ♦ Herpes
  - ♦ HPV

## HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF?

- ▶ **Abstaining** from oral, vaginal, and anal sex.
- ▶ Being in a **long-term, mutually monogamous relationship** with a partner known to be **uninfected**.
- ▶ **Reducing** your number of sexual partners.
- ▶ Using barriers such as **condoms or oral dams** every time you have sex.
- ▶ Talking with your partner(s) about **getting tested** and sharing both of your **STD/STI statuses** so you can both make an informed decision about the kinds of sex you want to have.
- ▶ **Getting vaccinated** for hepatitis A and B, and HPV.
- ▶ **Avoiding sex** when you are **under the influence** of substances that reduce your ability to make informed decisions for yourself.
- ▶ **If you're pregnant** or planning to get pregnant, talk to your healthcare provider about getting tested.

## WHY SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR STDs/STIs?

- ▶ You can have an STD/STI and **not have any symptoms** at all.
- ▶ **Getting tested regularly** enables you to get treated sooner. This can prevent serious health problems such as **infertility and death**.
- ▶ Get tested regularly so you can **prevent transmitting the STD/STI to your sex partners**. You can pass STDs/STIs to your partners **even if you don't have symptoms**.
- ▶ If you are **sexually active** with others, you should get tested for STDs/STIs **at least once a year**. Get tested **more frequently** if you have several partners or don't use protection like condoms.
- ▶ If you are **pregnant** or planning to get pregnant, STDs/STIs can cause **complications** and **serious side effects** for you and your baby.

## HOW DO I GET TESTED?

- ▶ **Make an appointment** with your healthcare provider and ask to be checked for STDs/STIs.
- ▶ Find a healthcare provider or testing location near you at **mass.gov/STDTesting**.

## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I GET MY RESULTS?

- ▶ If you test negative, it is **still important** to get tested regularly.
- ▶ If you test positive for an STD/STI, talk with your healthcare provider about a **treatment plan**.
- ▶ Letting your partners know about your diagnosis can help **prevent the spread** of STDs/STIs.
- ▶ If you are concerned about telling your partners about your diagnosis, want to do so anonymously, or need help figuring out how to start that conversation, the **Partner Services Program (PSP)** can help at **mass.gov/STDs**.

## HOW CAN I STAY HEALTHY MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY?

- ▶ Even though STDs/STIs are **very common**, they can come with **stigma** that can make people feel **worried, anxious, or even depressed**.
- ▶ It is **normal to have an emotional reaction** to an STD/STI diagnosis but **understanding the facts and focusing on treatment** can help.
- ▶ Ask your healthcare provider about **mental health resources** and **support groups** that can get you the care you need.

Take the next step. Get the info you need at

▶ ▶ ▶ **mass.gov/STDs** ◀ ◀ ◀

