

U Choose to Know

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Is your knowledge up to date?



When you teach about STIs, your students will usually have lots of questions, and it can be hard to keep up with evolving knowledge about risks, treatment, and methods of prevention. So here are some key updates:

Chlamydia hasn't gone away. Chlamydia remains a very common STI in Baltimore: there were 7,636 cases in Baltimore City in 2017, and 2,486 of these cases were among people aged 19 and younger. The good news is that chlamydia is a bacterial infection, which means that it's curable. The bad news is that there are often no symptoms, and if it's not caught and treated early, it can cause damage to the reproductive system and lead to infertility.

HPV is now preventable: Human papillomavirus (HPV) is thought to be the most common STI in the United States, affecting an estimated 90% of sexually active men and 80% of sexually active women during their lifetimes. Very often, people aren't aware they are infected because they don't have symptoms. HPV can cause genital warts and can also be spread to both partners via oral sex. If it's not treated, it can lead to cancer. HPV is not curable, but it can be prevented with a [safe and effective vaccine, which has recently been approved for both men and women aged 9-45](#).

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HIV is treatable, and the treatment can stop transmission. Once a death sentence, HIV can now be reduced to undetectable levels in a person's blood with medication. When levels of HIV are undetectable in a person's bloodstream, it's not transmissible to others.

There are more options than ever for HIV prevention. Although external (male) condoms have been recommended for many years as a primary way to prevent spreading HIV sexually, it's less commonly known that the internal (female) condom is an option for people who have anal sex. And a new drug called PrEP, or Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (brand name TRUVADA®), has been shown to be both safe and effective in helping to prevent HIV transmission when taken daily.

Baltimore has a wealth of resources for STI prevention and treatment. It's easy to find local [providers of PrEP](#) and [STI testing and treatment locations](#). These places also provide free external condoms, and many (such as Baltimore City Health Department, Planned Parenthood, and Chase Brexton Health Care) provide dental dams and lubricant as well.

And remember, there are some key facts your students need to know that haven't changed in a long time. Make sure your students know that...

- ... the most common symptom of an STI is NO symptoms. This is why it's critical to get tested.
- ... the consequences of not treating STIs can be serious. A few of these consequences include infertility, cancer, vision loss, and even death.
- ... once you have been treated for a bacterial STI, you can get it again (and again) if your partner is infected and hasn't been treated.
- ... STIs can also be transmitted via anal or oral sex, even for the receiver—so it's critical to use a condom or dental dam.
- ... barrier methods of protection and abstinence are still very effective ways to prevent STIs.

Want a refresher on STIs? **Check out the *Teacher's Guide to Sex Ed* online course on [Blackboard](#) and click on the **U Choose logo to get started.** You'll find a unit on STIs, along with seven other units covering key topics that will help you stay up to date on sex education topics and strategies.**



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