

# U Choose to Know

## What Is Dual Protection and Why Is It Important?



Although birth rates among young people have declined over the years, STI rates are soaring. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), adolescents ages 15-24 account for nearly half of the 20 million new cases of STDs each year.

Several factors may contribute to this rise, but it is important to note that when people begin a contraceptive method, it may decrease their use of condoms. That's why it's important that sex educators talk to young people about dual protection, which is the use of more than one method of contraception concurrently, providing protection from both STIs and pregnancy.

**“Well, I’m on birth control, so I don’t need to use a condom.”** When using LARCS, oral contraception, or any other method besides condoms, it is essential to also use a condom to reduce the chance of transmitting an STI. Young people may not have accurate knowledge about dual protection. Maybe no one ever talked to them about it, but you can.

**“We are only having sex with each other.”** A student’s partner may view the suggestion of using condoms as a sign of infidelity or lack of trust in the relationship. It’s important to emphasize that although people may be in a serious relationship, their partner may have sex with someone else. Things happen! It’s also important to note that many STIs have no symptoms and are not detectable until tested. So partners may have an STI from a previous relationship and not know it or just found out about it and want to protect their current partner.

**“I don’t have sex that much ... only sometimes.”** Youth in middle and high school are just starting to explore their sexuality. They may not have a consistent partner or even participate in sexual behaviors frequently. So they may think that they don't need to use condoms every time because they don't engage in sexual behaviors that often.

### Here are a few ways you can promote dual protection with your students:

- » Talk about condoms and STIs during lessons on contraception, and vice versa. Although it might seem repetitive, reinforcing this information sends the message that dual protection is important and can help the message “stick.”

### Examples of Dual Protection

- » long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), like implants or IUDs, with an internal or external condom
- » oral contraception (i.e., the pill) with an internal or external condom
- » the ring or patch with an internal or external condom

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» Talk about ways to make condoms more pleasurable to use. Students commonly say that sex doesn't feel as good with condoms, and the truth is that condoms can reduce sensation. Tell them that people who feel this way can do the following:

- » Try different brands, sizes, or types of condoms (but be sure they know that lambskin condoms don't offer protection from HIV).
- » Put a drop of lubricant on the inside of the external condom to increase sensation and use plenty of lubricant on the outside of an external condom.
- » Use flavored condoms or dental dams for oral sex.



- » Discuss the fact that condoms can increase pleasure by reducing worries about STIs and by making sex last longer.
- » Try to take away the stigma. Talk about how having condoms on-hand shows responsibility and maturity and discuss how teasing people about having condoms can negatively affect their willingness to protect themselves and others.
- » Ask students which birth control methods protect against STIs and which do not. Correct misinformation and make sure they understand that the only way to know if they have an STI is to get tested, since many STIs do not have any symptoms.
- » Remind them that it's everyone's job to protect themselves and their partners. It's not just the job of the person with a penis to carry an external condom or the person with a uterus to have an internal condom on-hand.
- » Focus on the need to plan ahead and make sure they know [where to find condoms for free](#).

Keep in mind that you can express the importance of dual protection to your students, but ultimately, it's their choice to use both condoms and another method of contraception. Some other tips to give students who still may not use dual protection are:

- » Get tested every year or every time you have a new partner. You can even go get tested with your partner.
- » Limit the number of sexual partners you have.
- » Have conversations with your partner about the importance of monogamy.
- » Have honest conversations with your partner about STIs and exposure.



### Resources for Your Youth:

**U Choose**, a project of the Baltimore City Health Department Refer students and parents to the U Choose website where they can find information on birth control methods, STIs and testing, relationships, and other resources.

**Talking to Your Partner About Condoms** TeensHealth® has an article that you can refer to when giving your students tips about how to talk to their partners about using condoms. It's split into three sections: what might my partner say, when should I talk to my partner about condoms, and how do you use a condom. *The article can be downloaded in Spanish as well!*

**Talking with Your Partner about Condoms and Birth Control** Planned Parenthood has resources for teens about the importance of communication in their relationship. This section goes into detail about the importance of using condoms with another form of birth control. You can use this for talking points and refer your students to this resource.



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