

# PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR BABY FROM SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

There is a lot to think about when you want to have a baby or a baby is on the way. One important step is to learn about sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Some STIs can cause problems with your pregnancy, like premature birth. You can also pass on STIs to your unborn child, either during pregnancy or in childbirth. STIs can cause serious health complications in infants, so the more you know, the more you can do to have a healthy baby.

---

STIs are mostly spread through sex – vaginal, oral, or anal sex. Some STIs are spread through semen, blood, or vaginal fluid while others can be spread through simple skin-to-skin contact. Some infections, like HIV and hepatitis, can also be spread by sharing needles.

Some key facts about STIs:

- You can get an STI even if you've only had sex one time.
- You can get some STIs (like chlamydia or gonorrhea) again and again if your partner doesn't get treated too.
- If you have unprotected sex, even with one partner, you need to be tested again.

Most people do NOT know they have an STI, since many STIs have no symptoms. This is why testing is so important—it is the only way to know if a person is infected. Since STIs can cause serious problems both for a pregnant person and their unborn baby, some STI tests are recommended during pregnancy. STIs can be treated and managed to help protect you and your baby.

## OVERVIEW

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are very common—there are about 26 million new STI cases in the U.S. each year.
- Some STIs can be passed on from a pregnant person to their baby. These STIs can cause serious harm.
- Treatment during pregnancy can help prevent a pregnant person from passing on STIs.
- It is important to test for certain STIs during pregnancy, to prevent these from being passed on to the baby.

### What STI tests are recommended during pregnancy?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends certain STI tests [for the first prenatal visit](#)—syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis B.

#### Syphilis

Syphilis infection in a newborn can cause serious health problems, even death shortly after birth. In fact, up to 40% of babies born to women with untreated syphilis may be stillborn, or die from the infection as a newborn. Infants who survive may develop multiple physical problems, usually right away but possibly years later.

Getting tested early in your pregnancy, and getting treated if you have syphilis, can help prevent serious health problems for both you and your baby.

### HIV

HIV is the human immunodeficiency virus. A person infected with HIV can pass the virus to their child during pregnancy, childbirth, or while breastfeeding. If you know you have HIV, there are medicines you can take that can reduce the risk of passing the virus to your baby.

### Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B virus is another STI that can be passed on during pregnancy. Newborns infected with hepatitis B have a high risk of developing chronic liver disease. However, newborns can be given treatment shortly after birth to prevent infection. It's important to know if you are infected with hepatitis B to ensure your baby gets treatment if needed.

### **Are there other STI tests I need?**

Possibly. Your healthcare provider might suggest other tests as well. For example, CDC recommends all pregnant women under age 25 be tested for chlamydia and gonorrhea. This is because those STIs are very common among young women and often have no symptoms. Like other STIs, chlamydia and gonorrhea can also cause problems with pregnancy and possibly harm your baby, so diagnosing treating these infections is important.

### **Herpes and Pregnancy**

While testing for herpes simplex virus (HSV) is not recommended for all pregnant people, if you or your partner has been diagnosed with genital herpes, you should share this with your healthcare provider. If you're pregnant and you have genital herpes, you may be concerned about the risk of spreading the infection to your baby. Be reassured that the risk is extremely small—especially if you have had herpes for some time. The greatest risk of

herpes in infants is to babies whose mothers contract a genital infection late in pregnancy. If your sexual partner has herpes, talk to your provider about steps that can help protect you from getting an infection during pregnancy.

### **Staying Healthy**

Remember that many STIs have no symptoms, so getting tested is the only way to know you have one. However, if you do have any symptoms that are unusual—like itching, discharge, or a rash—let your provider know.

Just like eating a well-balanced diet, getting enough rest, and exercising, getting tested for STIs as recommended during your pregnancy is just another way to keep you and your baby healthy.

### **Learn More**

Learn more about STIs from the American Sexual Health Association, a trusted nonprofit organization that has advocated on behalf of those at risk for STIs for more than a century. Our websites include:

[www.ashasexualhealth.org](http://www.ashasexualhealth.org)

[www.iwannaknow.org](http://www.iwannaknow.org)

[www.quierosaber.org](http://www.quierosaber.org)

[www.nccc-online.org](http://www.nccc-online.org)

[www.askexpertsnow.com](http://www.askexpertsnow.com)

[www.YESmeansTEST.org](http://www.YESmeansTEST.org)

