What are sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?
STIs are infections that are spread through sex (“sex”). Sometimes referred to as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) they are very common. It’s important to be aware of STIs and how to prevent them.

STIs are common infections like chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and HIV. The CDC estimates that nearly 20 million new sexually transmitted infections occur every year in this country, half among young people aged 15–24. If you have sex with someone who has a STI, you can get a STI too. Most people do not know it when they have a STI.

How do I know if I have a STI?
Some STIs will cause obvious symptoms. But many STIs cause no symptoms or only mild symptoms, so you may not know you have an infection. A test from your healthcare provider may be the only sure way to tell if you are infected.

If you do have symptoms, they may appear right away, or they might not show up for weeks or even months. They might come and go. Even if the symptoms disappear, you may still have a STI. To ensure you are sexually healthy you should regularly discuss STI screening with your provider.

A few words about healthy relationships
Don’t let anyone pressure you into having sex. Sometimes a partner will try to talk you into having sex by saying “you’d do it if you really loved me.” If they truly cared about you, they wouldn’t try to force you to do something you aren’t ready to do. It’s always okay to say no, even if you have said yes before.
When you are planning to have sex with someone new it is important to make sure you are on the same page about several things. Try to talk about these things with a new partner before sex:

- Type of relationship you want
- Sexually transmitted infection (STI) status
- Birth control
- Safe sex precautions
- Sexual pleasure

What do you mean “type of relationship?”
Committed or non-committed? Friendly or romantic?
Sexual or non-sexual? Having sex with only each other?

**TALKING ABOUT STIs** One in two sexually active persons will get a sexually transmitted infection (STI) by age 25. If you have been diagnosed with a STI, it’s important to talk to your sexual partner(s) about it. By opening up to a partner and talking about a STI diagnosis, you are showing that you respect and care about yourself as well as the other person.

**STARTING THE CONVERSATION**

If you’ve known for a while Before bringing up a STI diagnosis with a new partner, it might be best to let the relationship develop a bit first—get to know your partner, and let your partner get to know you.

Having the discussion prior to sexual activity is best for many reasons. If you wait until after, the conversation may become tangled in feelings of anger and mistrust. But, bringing it up right before sex or in the heat of the moment is not the best approach either. Just pick a good time when you think the relationship is moving toward sexual activity.

Remember—this should not be a confessional, as you are not apologizing or confessing anything. Having a STI does not mean a person has done something wrong. The bottom line is that sexual activity is a natural act that most everyone will have at some point in their lives, which means you are human.

Most people are mainly worried about their partner getting a STI. It’s good to be concerned about a partner and his or her best interest. But, it’s also good to be concerned about your own health and well-being, so please make any conversation a two-way discussion. Your partner should have already gotten a STI. This conversation should be part of a larger conversation about you and your partner’s sexual health.

**WHAT TO EXPECT** Some people may overreact, but many won’t bat an eye. A partner will likely have some misinformation, misconceptions or preconceived notions about STIs, so it’s best to be prepared to address some questions. You can start by sharing the information in this brochure and encourage your partner to visit ASHA’s website, www.ashasexualhealth.org, so they can seek further information, especially if questions come up that you do not know how to answer.

**Talking about birth control**

If there is a risk of pregnancy, you and your partner will need to discuss what if you want to use a prevention method. Think about asking “Are you currently taking a pill or other form of birth control? Are you open to the possibility of pregnancy? What birth control precautions do you want to use?”

**What about “safe sex precautions?”**

Many forms of birth control will not protect against STIs so you may choose to also use a barrier such as a condom. Think about asking “What barriers do you want to use? What kind of sexual activities are you willing to enjoy without barriers?”

**Talking about pleasure**

Sexual pleasure: What kind of touch feels good to you? Where are the places that you especially enjoy being touched? Are you open to being touched, caressed, kissed, held or held? The more you explore and know your own body through masturbation, the clearer you can be about what kind of touch you enjoy.

Tip: One way to communicate what you enjoy is by showing your partner how you like to touch yourself. Masturbating in front of a partner is both hot and informative! If your partner can watch the way you stroke your penis/rub your clitoris or use a sex toy, they can touch you in similar ways.

Sexual desires: What are sexual activities you know you like and want to do? Ones you have never done but think you might like to try? Ones you might be willing to try? Do you have fantasies you would like to talk about, role play (pretend to act out), or act out?

Sexual boundaries: What are the sexual activities or fantasies you are not willing to explore? Are there places on your body that you do not want to be touched?

Tip: Make a Yes-No-Maybe chart: Off by yourself, make a list of the things you like to do (Yes!), are not open to trying or don’t want to try again (No!), and things you might like to consider doing (Maybe!). Then get together and share your lists. You might both find some happy surprises!