



Talking to your Teens about STDs

Your health is important.

Because the Youens and Duchicela Clinic believes this, the following is brought to you in an effort to provide wellness information that you can use to help manage and maintain your health.

This week, the focus is on sexually transmitted diseases.

A sexually-transmitted disease (STD) is a general term for any number of diseases that can be spread through unprotected sexual contact.

STDs are widespread. A 2007 report by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 19 million new infections of sexually transmitted diseases occur each year, with almost half of those being among young people age 15 – 24. Teenagers who engage in unprotected sex are at risk for a variety of STDs. And the number of teenagers engaging in sexual activity may surprise you.

A 2007 CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System Survey found that

- 47.8% of 9th to 12th graders have had sexual intercourse.
- 7.1% of children have had intercourse before age 13.
- 14.9% of high school students have had sexual intercourse with 4 or more people.
- 38.5% of sexually active 9th to 12th graders did not use condoms during their last sexual encounter.

Certainly, everyone should take the spread of STDs seriously. Many STDs pose long-term health risks, some of which may not appear until years after initial contact. Females, for instance, can be at risk for infertility later in life if chlamydia or gonorrhea—the two most commonly reported infectious diseases in America—are left untreated.



In addition to the threat of infertility, increased risk of HIV acquisition and other health risks for males and females, STDs have a substantial economic impact. CDC estimates STDs cost the U.S. healthcare system as much as \$15.3 billion annually in 2007 dollars. Ultimately, the spread of STDs affects the bottom-line of all Americans.

To reduce the number of STD cases, the CDC supports a comprehensive approach to prevention that includes expanded screening, treatment, and behavioral interventions. Certainly, routine check-ups with a family physician followed by disease screenings are important, but so too is the primary caretaker's role in terms of education and behavioral influence.

Parents and guardians have important roles to play in the health and wellness of children. Teenagers, especially, may be curious, experimental, and susceptible to peer pressure, so parents and guardians need to be aware and available for those in their care.

A doctor can guide a caretaker in opening a meaningful dialogue with a teenager regarding sexual health and disease prevention. Alternately, the CDC provides a wealth of online resources to not only arm individuals with more information, but it allows free downloads and ordering of print materials which adults can consider sharing with teens. Check-out <http://www.cdc.gov/std/>.

More information about STDs and referrals to STD clinics can be obtained toll-free by dialing 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636). Information is available in English en Espanol.

The information provided here is not to be used as a substitute for medical attention. Remember that, should you have specific medical questions or desire more information, contact your doctor.