



San Francisco Department of Public Health

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Take Charge of Your Sexual Health: 5 Steps to Fight STDs

As rates continue to rise, Health Department encourages young women, pregnant women, men who have sex with men and transgender people to get tested

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAN FRANCISCO (April 17, 2019) — April is sexually transmitted disease (STD) awareness month. It is essential to know about STDs and how prevention and testing are critical to overall health. Bay Area health officials are urging everyone who is sexually active, especially young people, women, transgender people and men who have sex with men to take charge of their sexual health.

STD testing is now more crucial than ever because STD rates are continuing to rise, increasing steadily in San Francisco and statewide since 2013. Rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis continue to grow, and syphilis has re-emerged as a significant public health concern. In California, 283 infants were born with syphilis in 2017. In San Francisco, between 2017 and 2018, the number of women with syphilis has increased 144 percent to 71.

Chlamydia is the most common reportable disease in California. This disease, like most STDs, is easily preventable and treatable but can cause serious health problems such as infertility if left untreated. In San Francisco, between 2013 and 2017, reported cases of chlamydia rose 79 percent from 5,085 to 9,094. Many of these cases are in young women.

"Quite often, someone can have an STD and not show any symptoms. An important way to stop the ongoing spread of STDs is for more people to get checked regularly and talk to their partners about getting checked as well," said Dr. Susan Philip, STD Controller for San Francisco. "Condom use is also effective and a good option for people. The power to prevent STDs is in your hands."

In San Francisco, we do have some good news. Fewer people were diagnosed with HIV in 2017 than at any previous time since the disease was identified. That progress is thanks to people who are HIV-positive using treatment that prevents the spread, and people who are



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HIV-negative using PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) to resist infection. Both of these measures keep individuals healthy and prevent HIV transmission.

The rising cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis are curable with antibiotics. Yet because they do not cause symptoms, these infections can go undiagnosed and untreated, which can lead to infertility, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth and increased HIV risk. In San Francisco, the Health Department's City Clinic is dedicated to sexual health, helping patients to prevent, test and treat sexually transmitted diseases.

STDs are preventable and treatable. These **five steps** can help everyone reduce risk:

- **Using condoms** correctly and consistently is a great strategy to prevent STDs, HIV and pregnancy
- **Get tested** regularly
 - Sexually active women under 26 years old should be screened for gonorrhea and chlamydia annually
 - Gay men and other men who have sex with men, trans women and trans men who have sex with men should be screened for gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis every three months
 - Talk to your provider if you have questions about whether you need screening for STDs
 - You can sign up for testing reminders here: <https://www.bedsider.org/reminders>
- **Get vaccinated** to prevent Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Human Papillomavirus (HPV), all of which can be transmitted through sex
- Have open and **honest conversations** about sexual health with partners: <https://www.thestdproject.com/how-to-tell-someone-you-have-an-std/>
- Let your sex partners know if you've been diagnosed with an STD: <https://www.tellyourpartner.org/>
- It can be common to have an STD without experiencing any symptoms. If you are sexually active, **talk to your provider** about being tested for STDs, even if you feel fine.

For more information about STDs and sexual health, as well as free or low cost expert STD testing and treatment services in San Francisco, visit www.sfcityclinic.org or find a provider at <https://gettested.cdc.gov>.

For more information about STDs in California, visit <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/STD.aspx>.

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