

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

*Questions and Answers for When
You Return to the Community*



U.S. Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Prisons

Going home again means that you have the chance to make a fresh start. But you will also face risks when you return. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), which you get by having sex with an infected person, are among the most common infectious diseases in the U.S. Anyone who has sex can get an STD if they have sex with an infected person and do not use a condom. Using a condom can help protect you from STDs.

By giving you these facts about STDs before you return home, you will be able to practice behaviors that can protect you from infection. This information can also help you talk with your partner about STDs and ways to prevent them.

Five Things You Need to Know About STDs:

1. Men and women of all ages, races, ethnic backgrounds, and incomes can get an STD by having sex without a condom. You can get an STD whether you are straight or gay.
2. You can prevent STDs. The best way to prevent them is by not having sex. If you start having sex, there are things you can do to avoid infection.
3. You should talk with your partner(s) about preventing STDs. Talk with them about their sexual histories. Share your history as well. Before you have sex, decide what sex acts are safe for you. Have a plan to protect yourself from STDs.
4. Many STDs can be cured with treatment. Some can be treated so that they do not get worse.
5. Drinking alcohol and using drugs puts you more at risk of getting an STD. Even if you know about STDs, preventing them may not seem important when you are high.

How Do I Know If I Am at Risk for STDs?

Just knowing the facts about STDs and their warning signs may not be enough to reduce your risk. You may still think that you can tell just by looking at a person if he or she has an STD. Unless you are involved in a monogamous relationship, where neither you nor your partner has sex with others, stop for a minute to

- Think about what you know and what you believe about how a person gets an STD. Remember that anyone who has sex without a condom can get an STD.
- Think about any times when you had unsafe sex (without a condom). Have you ever had an STD? Have you ever been tested for one?
- Think about your sex partner(s) and the STDs and drug use in their past. What do they think and know about STDs?
- Think about what you would do if your sex partner had sores or other signs of an STD.

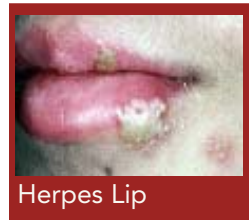
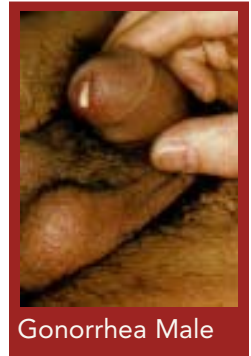
How Can I Reduce My Risk?

Think about how you can use this information to reduce your risk for STDs.

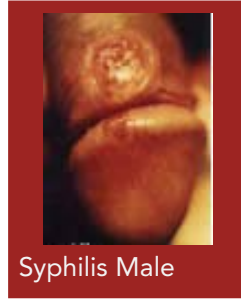
- You may be returning home to a spouse or life partner. You might want to talk to your partner about sexual activity that occurred while you were incarcerated. An honest discussion can help build trust and address concerns you or your partner have.
- Unless you are in a monogamous relationship (one exclusive partner) with an uninfected person, you should use condoms each time you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- Know the correct way to use condoms to better protect you and your partner.
- Talk with your partner(s) about their drug and alcohol use. Substance use can lead to risky behaviors. Some substance use can cause other kinds of infectious diseases.
- Share with your partner what you know about risks for STDs.
- Choose ways to reduce your risk for STDs. Decide with your partner how to enjoy sex and avoid risks at the same time.

Know the Symptoms of STDs

- Notice if you or your partner have sores, rashes, an odd discharge, or pain in the genital area. Don't have sex if you have these symptoms.
- Do not have sex if you have symptoms. If you can't avoid sex, be sure to use a condom or other type of protection that prevents contact with sores or lesions.
- **Chlamydia and Gonorrhea.** May or may not be any symptoms. Symptoms can include burning when urinating (peeing). Men - discharge from penis, pain or swelling in the testicles (balls). Women - vaginal fluid that does not look normal, lower abdominal or back pain, pain during sex, and bleeding during menstrual cycles.
- **Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV).** May cause blisters on or around genitals or rectum; herpes sores on the mouth can also be spread.
- **Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).** You may be infected with HIV and not have any symptoms for 7-10 years.



- **Syphilis.** One or more sores, lasting 3-6 weeks, at the spot where bacteria entered the body; sores will heal but infection remains; may be a rash on the palms of the hands or bottoms of feet; rashes clear up on their own.



- **Hepatitis B Virus (HBV).** About 30% of persons with HBV have no signs or symptoms. HBV symptoms: fatigue, abdominal pain, jaundice (yellowish skin), loss of appetite.
- **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).** You may have HPV and not be able to see it; you may notice genital warts (soft, moist, pink or red swellings around the genitals).

Get Treatment If You See the Symptoms of an STD

- Go to your doctor for STD tests and get treatment. Immediate treatment will cure some STDs and slow their spread.
- You may be worried about how to tell your partner you have an STD. Ask your doctor or health care provider to help you talk to your partner about it.
- Follow your doctor's directions.
- Take all of the medicine you are given.
- To make sure your treatment works, don't have sex of any kind until your doctor says it's okay.

What Do Alcohol and Drugs Have to Do with STDs?

- When you feel high from drinking alcohol or using drugs, you may not be as careful as you should be. You are more likely to take risks when you feel high and turned on. Don't let drug abuse lead to risky behavior.
- People who inject, or "shoot," drugs risk getting infectious diseases like AIDS and hepatitis B. If you have sex with someone who shoots drugs, you will be at risk of getting one of these diseases.
- Drinking can make you do things you would not do when you are sober. You might want to have sex with someone and not know if they are healthy or not. Drinking will not help reduce your risk for STDs.
- People who drink a lot or often use drugs may trade sex for money. They may be willing to have sex without a condom.
- You may not know that a person drinks a lot or takes drugs. You also may not know that they take risks with sex because of those habits.
- Some illegal drugs, like crack cocaine or methamphetamine (speed), can increase your sex drive. Viagra, a legal drug, can also do this. These drugs may make you feel more sexual, but you also may feel tempted to have sex without a condom.

How Do I Talk to a Sex Partner About Safer Sex (Using Condoms)?

- In today's world, you have to use your brain as well as your body when having sex. To stay healthy you should talk with your partner before you have sex.
- You may feel nervous talking about safer sex. Begin by talking with your friends about safer sex. How do they discuss it with their sex partners?
- You may feel better having sex than talking about sex with a partner. But have the talk before you start having sex.
- Start by asking your partner a question:

**"I have heard a lot about safer sex.
What do you think about it?"**

- Tell your partner that you want to have sex, and you want to be sure you both are safe:

**"I want to have sex with you.
I also want to feel safe."**

- Talk to your partner about what you think and know about safer sex.
- If you knew your sex partner before going to a correctional facility, be ready to ask about her or his sex life while you were away.
- Stress that this is not about trust and what happened in the past. It is about having a safe and healthy future.
- Be ready to talk about your own sex life and what you did while you were in the facility. These questions can feel very personal, but so is sex.
- Know ahead of time what sex acts and methods of protection you are comfortable with. If you know your comfort level, you will be able to plan ahead to reduce your risk.
- Be prepared. Have condoms at hand.
- Remember: drinking and drug use can prevent you from having safer sex.
- Be careful about who you have sex with. Only have sex when you really want to. And only have sex in ways that are safe and feel good to you and your partner.

