



Four sisters.  
Four stories.  
For you.

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Sex, pregnancy,  
HIV and more.



# Soulful, straight talk

from women who want to share where they've been. Whom they've trusted. And what they know now. When it comes to the complicated issues of pregnancy, sex, STDs and HIV, these women have stories to tell. In these pages, you'll find honest discussions about everything from what it's like to get tested to how proper prenatal care can help keep babies from getting HIV. There's also a Q&A section in the back with facts and answers to common questions.

*\*These stories are based on interviews with real women living in Texas. Names and some details have been changed.*



A big scare makes her smarter, stronger and safer

**Kelli**  
age 19

Living with HIV. Looking forward to life

**Katy**  
age 25

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**Lydia**  
age 27

Hoping and coping with HIV and a new baby

**Roshawn**  
age 35


Taking control



kelli

“*That test made me think about what I was doing and how I was living.*”





**My name is Kelli. I'm 19 years old, and I have a one-year-old daughter. I'm a laid back, outgoing person. I like to give people respect, and I like people to respect me.**

**M**y older sister Jemele is HIV positive. She found out she had it when she was 15, and I feel like I've been through it with her. We talk a lot, and I've been to her doctor's appointments. It's a bad disease, but she lives with it and gets by day by day.

Last year, I got a visit from a lady from the health department. She told me that someone I had sex with had turned in my name and that I might have been exposed to HIV. I was so scared. I didn't want to go get tested. But my sister made me do it. She said it's better to know than to have the disease and not get the right care. Plus, if I had HIV, I could get medicines to keep my baby from getting it. So I went to a clinic and got tested, and it came back negative.

That test made me think about what I was doing and how I was living. Before, depending on who I was with, I didn't use condoms every time. I didn't think I would get HIV because I always asked the guys I slept with if they had any diseases, and they all told me no. But I guess


people don't always tell the truth. Or they don't know what they have. I never found out how I got exposed. You can't tell who has it by looking at them, that's for sure.

Now, I use condoms all the time. If I had a friend who wasn't using condoms, I'd tell her she's crazy. Most of the girls I know around here say

*“ She told me that someone I'd been with had turned in my name, and that I had been exposed to HIV. ”*

they're only with one person and that he's not messing around, but they don't know that. A lot of times, he's out there cheating on them. You have to take care of yourself first, and that means getting tested and using condoms.





**katy**  
“ I thought I was  
going to die, and  
I thought my baby  
was going to die. ”

**My name is Katy, and I'm 25. I'm married, and I have one son, Jake, who is two. We live in a small town in East Texas. I've lived here all my life.**

People here don't talk much about HIV. When they do talk, a lot of the stuff they say is wrong. People think they can get HIV by touching or sitting on a toilet seat. Most people don't educate themselves about it.

I never thought I was at risk for HIV. I never even thought about it. I

didn't have sex very often before I got married, and I never got a Pap smear or anything like that. Then, when I was pregnant with Jake, they did all the tests and found out I was HIV positive. I had no clue that I might have it. I had never had any symptoms or anything.

When I found out, it was horrible. Finding out you're positive is like when someone hurts your feelings so bad you can't even say anything about it. All you can do is cry. I thought my husband was going to leave me. I thought I was going to die, and I thought my baby was going to die. I thought my baby would automatically get HIV, too. I didn't know there were medications that could keep my baby from getting infected.

My doctors and caseworkers were really caring. They told me

what I needed to know and got me on medications to protect my baby and keep me healthy. When they decided to start me on my meds, the pills were too big and they sometimes made me sick to my stomach, but they got easier and easier to take.

*“Living with HIV is hard, but there is hope. I live my life just like everyone else.”*

During my pregnancy, I tried to stay especially healthy. I made it to all of my doctor's appointments, and I ate right and took folic acid. I was very lucky that Jake was born HIV negative.



My husband was upset when he first found out, but he loves me and he's stayed with me. He got tested right away, and he was negative. Now we always use condoms, and he gets tested every three months, just to be sure.

Basically, I've just been doing everything my doctors say. They said if I wanted to live, I have to take the medicine. So I take it twice a day every day, and I never miss a dose. I have to take care of myself so that I can take care of my family.

Living with HIV is hard, but there is hope. I have a beautiful, healthy little boy and a good family. I live my life just like everybody else.







“lydia  
*I didn't take any  
medicine to keep my  
baby from getting  
HIV because I didn't  
know I had it.*”

**My name is Lydia, and I am 27 years old. I came to Texas five years ago. I have four children – a seven-year-old boy, a five-year-old girl, a two-year-old girl and a baby boy who is eight months old.**

**W**here I'm from, people didn't talk about HIV very much, but it was always in the back of my mind. There was a saying where I'm from that everyone had HIV, but they just didn't know it yet. I was tested for HIV in 1999, and that test came back negative.

Then, I got married, so I didn't think I needed to be tested after that. I was only with one man, so we didn't use protection. I didn't feel there was anything I could do.

When I was pregnant with my third baby, Elena, the clinic told me my blood would be tested for HIV unless I told them I didn't want the test. I thought I was fine, so I didn't have the test. That was a mistake.

When Elena was born, they tested me again and found out I had HIV. Even though I had prenatal care, I didn't take any medicine to keep my baby from getting HIV because I didn't know I had it.

When I first found out I had HIV, I wanted to die. I cried because I thought I'd given HIV to my baby, but the doctors

said there was still a chance Elena didn't have it. When they first tested her, the test came back positive, but the doctor said that could be from the HIV antibodies in my blood.

*“ I would tell all pregnant women to take the HIV test as soon as possible, even if you're married. ”*

The doctor gave Elena anti-HIV medication, and I did everything they told me to do. The closest HIV doctor was four hours away, but my case manager made sure I could get to all the appointments. She also helped me fill out the paperwork to help pay for our medicines. After several weeks and more HIV tests, Elena tested negative. I feel very blessed.

Many people don't realize HIV is a problem for women. Lots of women don't use condoms. At work, I hear

about married women having sex with other men, and they never talk about using protection. Men do the same thing. Even if you think you are safe, you just never know. I would tell all pregnant women to take the HIV test as soon as possible, even if you're married. If you don't do it for yourself, do it for your baby.

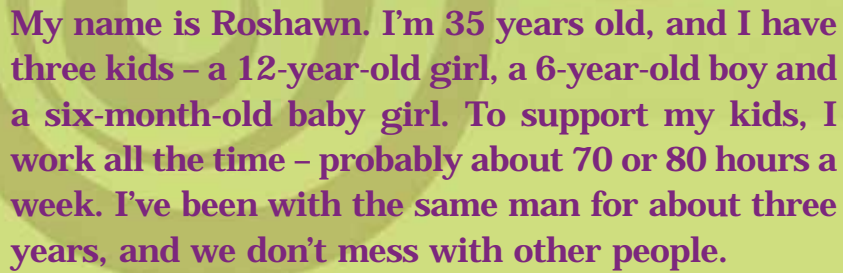






roshawn

“ I didn't want  
to tell him; I didn't  
know what he  
would say or do. ”



**My name is Roshawn. I'm 35 years old, and I have three kids – a 12-year-old girl, a 6-year-old boy and a six-month-old baby girl. To support my kids, I work all the time – probably about 70 or 80 hours a week. I've been with the same man for about three years, and we don't mess with other people.**

I grew up in Dallas, and living there I heard a lot about HIV and AIDS, especially after Magic Johnson told everyone he had HIV. I had been tested in 2000, and my test was negative. Then when I was pregnant, I got tested again. That test came back negative for HIV but positive for chlamydia.

I was very surprised. I hadn't had any of the symptoms, like discharge or pain when I went to the bathroom. My doctor said that most people don't have symptoms, so they don't know when they have chlamydia. She said it was good I got tested, because if it isn't treated, it could have long-term effects on me and be dangerous for the baby. Luckily, they can cure chlamydia.

I had to tell my baby's daddy so that we could both get treated. Otherwise, we would keep giving it to each other. I didn't want to tell him; I didn't know what he would say or do. But just because I found out first doesn't mean I gave it to him. He might have given it to me. We both have pasts. Before I was with my baby's daddy, I didn't always

use protection. And I know he didn't always use protection with all of his girlfriends, either.

When he went to the doctor to get treated for the chlamydia, he also got tested for everything else. That way we could be sure that we were both safe and that the baby was safe.

Our baby girl was born healthy. Now I feel like it's my job to tell all my friends to use condoms every time they have sex. And I've already talked to my 12-year-old about HIV and STDs. I told her that the best way to avoid

“*Before I was with my baby's daddy, I didn't always use protection.*”

getting diseases is to not have sex. I hope that if she knows the facts and how to protect herself, she won't ever be at risk for HIV or STDs.



# 10 Questions

{ About Pregnancy and HIV }

## 1. What can I do to help make sure I have a healthy pregnancy?

- \* Keep all of your doctor's appointments and follow your doctor's advice. If you have questions about your pregnancy, be sure to ask them.
- \* Keep a healthy diet by eating fruits, vegetables, grains and calcium-rich foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt. Avoid foods high in saturated fat.
- \* Take 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day. Folic acid is a vitamin that can prevent birth defects of the brain and spine. The best way to do this is by taking a daily multivitamin with folic acid or eating a bowl of cereal with 100% of the daily value (DV) of folic acid per serving every day.
- \* Talk to your doctor before taking any drug, including over-the-counter medicines. Many medicines are not safe to take during pregnancy.
- \* Unless your doctor tells you not to, try to be physically active for at least 30 minutes daily. Be sure to get enough rest and sleep, too.

*Don't smoke, don't drink and don't take drugs. All of these can cause long-term damage to your baby. Talk with your doctor if you need help stopping.*

## 2. Do I need to get tested for HIV if I'm pregnant?

- \* Yes. Pregnant women should get tested for HIV at their first prenatal visit and when they go to the hospital to have the baby. In fact, doctors in Texas are required by law to do these tests on all pregnant women unless the woman refuses.



*Without treatment, about one in four babies born to HIV-positive mothers will be born with HIV.*

### **3. How does HIV get from the mother to the baby?**

- \* A pregnant woman can pass HIV to her baby in the womb, during labor and delivery, or by breastfeeding.

### **4. Should I get tested for other sexually transmitted diseases?**

- \* If you are at risk for HIV, you should also be tested for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Left untreated, some STDs can cause serious problems during pregnancy and at birth, including blindness, deafness, mental retardation, physical deformities and even death.

### **5. If I think I'm pregnant, when should I start prenatal care?**

- \* As soon as you think you might be pregnant, you should go to the doctor. Starting prenatal care early and going to the doctor regularly during your pregnancy has health benefits for both you and your baby.

### **6. What are the benefits of prenatal care?**

- \* Regular prenatal care allows your doctor to monitor the progress of your pregnancy. If there are any problems with your pregnancy, they can be treated as soon as possible. Some problems can even be prevented.

### **7. What can be done for my baby if I'm HIV positive?**

- \* Doctors have learned that anti-HIV medicines can greatly reduce the chances of a mother passing HIV to her baby. If you test positive for HIV, your doctor will discuss this and other treatment options with you. Your doctor may also discuss different ways for you to have the baby.

### **8. What can be done for me?**

- \* Recent advances in drug treatment have made it possible for many people with HIV to lead longer, healthier lives. The sooner you find out you have HIV, the more options you have for treating it. You can also take steps to avoid infecting other people.

### **9. What can I do to avoid getting HIV?**

- \* The only sure way to avoid getting HIV through sex is not having sex (abstinence). Vaginal, oral and anal sex can all pass HIV and other STDs from one person to another.
- \* If you choose to have sex, use a condom every time. When used correctly, latex condoms can help protect you from HIV and other STDs.
- \* Stay with one partner who only has sex with you and who doesn't share needles. Use condoms unless you and your partner have both tested negative for HIV.
- \* Never share needles or syringes or other "works" to shoot drugs or for anything else (piercing, tattoos).

*While condoms aren't 100% effective, they are the best protection available for people who are sexually active.*

### **10. What are some other ways women can stay healthy?**

- \* If you're sexually active, get tested for HIV and other STDs. The only way to be sure you have or don't have HIV or other STDs is to get tested at a doctor's office or STD clinic. Encourage your sex partner(s) to get tested, too.
- \* If you test positive for an STD, make sure you and your partner are treated for STDs to avoid re-infection.

- \* If you're a woman over 18, or if you're sexually active, get a breast and pelvic exam every year, or as often as recommended by your doctor. This exam should include a Pap smear.
- \* Stop or reduce your use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Drug treatment programs are available for people who want to stop using. But if you don't stop, don't share needles and other equipment to shoot drugs.
- \* Have a good support network. Friends or family members can help keep you in good mental and physical health. Working with a counselor, support group or clergy member may also help.

### **Where can I call for more information?**

- \* Call the toll-free Texas HIV/STD Info Line at 1-800-299-2437 to find out where in your area you can get tested for HIV and other STDs.
- \* To learn more about prenatal care, call the National Women's Health Information Center at 1-800-994-9662. This is a free call.

*Take care of each other. Share this information with the women in your community.*

# 8 Common STDs

*{ you should know about }*

Name	Possible Signs	Possible Results	Treatments
HIV	<p>The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested. You cannot rely on symptoms to tell if you have HIV. The following may be warning signs that you are infected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>swollen glands</li> <li>fatigue</li> <li>night sweats</li> <li>hard-to-treat oral or vaginal yeast infection</li> <li>diarrhea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AIDS - the body's inability to fight off infections and cancers</li> <li>death</li> </ul>	No cure, but proper treatment can extend life for many years.
SYPHILIS	<p>About 2-6 weeks after infection, painless sore(s) on or near genitals, anus or mouth; goes away.</p> <p>About 3-6 weeks (or more) after sore appears, rash on hands, feet or other body parts; may come and go over 1-2 years.</p> <p>Symptoms may be mild or never appear, and may also be flu-like.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>damage to heart</li> <li>blindness</li> <li>mental illness</li> <li>death</li> <li>increased risk for HIV</li> </ul>	Cured with antibiotics, but damage can be permanent.
GENITAL HERPES	<p>About 2-20 days after infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>itching, burning, pain in legs, buttocks or genital area</li> <li>vaginal discharge</li> <li>pressure in abdomen</li> <li>small red bumps, blisters or sores that crust over and heal in days</li> </ul> <p>Many people infected with genital herpes have no symptoms. If symptoms do appear, they may be mild or flu-like.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recurring outbreaks throughout life</li> </ul>	No cure, but medication can help reduce symptoms.
CHLAMYDIA	<p>About 1-3 weeks after infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>burning sensation when urinating</li> <li>discharge from penis or vagina</li> </ul> <p>Most people infected with chlamydia have no symptoms. If symptoms do appear, they may be mild.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in women, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)</li> <li>infertility</li> </ul>	Cured with antibiotics, but damage can be permanent.
GONORRHEA	<p>About 2-10 days after infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discharge from penis, vagina or rectum</li> <li>painful, difficult urination</li> <li>infection through oral sex can result in a sore throat</li> <li>in women, abdominal pain, bleeding between periods</li> </ul> <p>Most men who are infected have some symptoms. But in women, the symptoms may be mild or never appear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>infertility</li> <li>in women, pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), causing problems with pregnancy</li> <li>damage to joints, heart, brain</li> </ul>	Cured with antibiotics, but damage can be permanent.
HEPATITIS B	<p>About 4 weeks or more after infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fatigue</li> <li>loss of appetite</li> <li>diarrhea, nausea</li> <li>dark, foamy urine; pale feces</li> <li>abdominal pain</li> <li>yellowing of skin, whites of eyes</li> <li>joint pain</li> </ul> <p>Symptoms may be mild or never appear, and may also be flu-like.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lifelong infection</li> <li>possibly fatal liver problems, including cancer</li> <li>immune system problems</li> </ul>	No cure, but treatment can help. (Most recover, but some stay infected for life.) A vaccine for hepatitis B is available. Ask your doctor if you should be vaccinated.
HPV (GENITAL WARTS)	<p>About 3 months or more after infection, small, hard, painless bumps may appear inside or around vagina, penis or anus, or in the mouth. Bumps can develop tops like cauliflower.</p> <p>Many people infected with HPV have no symptoms. If symptoms do appear, they may be mild.</p> <p>In women, abnormal cell changes can lead to cervical cancer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased risk for genital cancers</li> <li>difficulty in childbirth</li> </ul>	No cure for HPV, but warts can be treated. Regular Pap tests can catch cell changes early, before they become cancerous. A vaccine against some types of HPV may be available in the next 1-2 years.
TRICHOMONIASIS	<p>About 1-2 weeks or more after infection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>foul smelling discharge from vagina</li> <li>itching, swelling or redness in vagina</li> <li>pain during sex</li> <li>burning urination</li> </ul> <p>Men rarely have symptoms. In women, symptoms may be mild or may never appear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>problems during pregnancy, including premature breaking of water and premature delivery</li> </ul>	Cured with antibiotics.



INFORMATION IN THIS BOOKLET IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR TALKING WITH YOUR MEDICAL PROVIDER.

PHOTOS IN THIS BOOKLET ARE OF MODELS WITH NO RELATION TO THE STORIES.



**TEXAS**  
Department of  
State Health Services

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES  
HIV / STD COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES BRANCH

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