

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH

What you need to know about preventive services





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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WHAT'S IN THIS GUIDE?

- **Action steps for achieving good sexual health**
- **Information on recommended sexual health services for people of all genders**
- **Tips on how to talk with a health professional**
- **Resources on sexual health topics**

This guide informs people of all ages, including teens and older adults, about sexual health. It focuses on the preventive services (screenings, vaccines, and counseling) that can help protect and improve your sexual health. The guide explains these recommended services and helps you find and talk with a health care provider.

Typically, preventive service recommendations are made for “men” and “women.” We understand that this is not inclusive terminology and recognize that gender is not binary but rather a spectrum of biological, mental, and emotional traits that exist along a continuum. As a result, whenever possible we have split the recommendations into those for people with a vagina/vulva, those for people with a penis, and provided links to additional resources.

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What Is Good Sexual Health and How Do I Achieve It?

A healthier body. A satisfying sex life. Valuing and feeling good about yourself. Having peace of mind. Positive and satisfying relationships. Avoiding sexually transmitted infections (STIs), also known as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Preventing unplanned pregnancies. These are just a few of the important benefits of good sexual health. Being sexually healthy means being able to enjoy a healthier body, a satisfying sexual life, positive relationships, and peace of mind. Being sexually healthy also means enjoying your sexuality and taking care of yourself and your partners throughout your life. Being free to talk about sexual health with your partner and health professional is key to your health.

ACTION STEPS TO GOOD SEXUAL HEALTH

There are five key steps you can take to help you achieve good sexual health. These steps apply regardless of your age or the relationships you choose to have:

1. **Value who you are and decide what's right for you**
2. **Get smart about your body and protect it**
3. **Treat your partners well and expect them to treat you well**
4. **Build positive relationships**
5. **Make sexual health part of your health care routine**

Value who you are and decide what's right for you.

Sex is a natural part of life. Sex can bring you pleasure, intimacy, and joy. But it is up to you to decide if, and when, you want to have sex. First, think about what you want. Then, define your own values, desires, and boundaries. These might change depending on your stage in life.

Get smart about your body and protect it. Learn about your body and how it works. Explore ways to express yourself sexually. Practice safer sex to protect yourself and your partners from STIs and unplanned pregnancies.

Condoms can prevent both STIs and unplanned pregnancies, while other contraceptive methods only prevent pregnancy. For extra protection, some people use condoms along with their chosen method of birth control.

Treat your partners well and expect them to treat you well. Be with someone who makes you feel good about yourself, comfortable and safe. Partners should respect your boundaries and should not pressure or force you to do something you don't want to. You should also respect your partner and not force them to do anything they don't want to.

Build positive relationships by having open and honest conversations about your relationship, desires, and sexual health. Respect each other and make decisions together. If health problems come up, discuss them openly and get medical care. Seek help if your partner is violent, abusive, or pressures you or tries to control you. Talk to your health professional or find a program that helps people who are experiencing violence in their relationship.

Make sexual health part of your health care routine.

This will help protect your sexual health and well-being. Find a health professional who makes you feel comfortable and respects you. You have a right to good medical care. Talk openly with your health care provider about how to stay healthy. Share any concerns or problems you may have about your sexual health. At your next visit, ask questions and get the services that are recommended for you. **It's time to give sexual health the attention it deserves.**

To learn more, visit [FiveActionSteps.org](https://www.fiveactionsteps.org).

What Are Preventive Sexual Health Services?

A range of preventive sexual health services is available to help you stay healthy and detect and treat any problems early. These services are recommended by many leading medical organizations.*

Most of these services are now available at no cost under the Affordable Care Act, but check with your insurer to make sure your health plan covers them. Low-cost or free services might also be available at community health centers and family planning clinics. See the **Where to Learn More** chapter to help you find a provider or nearby clinic.

PREVENTIVE SERVICES INCLUDE:

- **Screenings** that test for sexually transmitted infections, whether or not you have symptoms
- **Vaccines**, such as the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, which decrease your risk of getting the virus that causes genital warts, cervical cancer, and some other cancers (anal, oral, and penile)
- **Counseling** to help you make healthy decisions. For example, you can learn about the best ways to protect yourself and your partner from getting sexually transmitted infections

Most preventive service recommendations by leading organizations are made for “men” or for “women.”

We understand that this is not inclusive terminology and, whenever possible, we have split the recommendations into those for people with a vagina/vulva and those for people with a penis.

If you are gender non-conforming or transgender, you can also find more guidance [at the end of this guide](#).



A NOTE ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

If you are covered by your parent’s or partner’s health insurance, keep in mind that a list of the health care services you receive might appear on their routine insurance statements. Ask your health care provider if the sexual health care services you are getting will be reported, and make sure you are comfortable with their policy.

*The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, and other national organizations recommend these services.

Preventive Services for Transgender and Gender-Expansive Individuals

Preventive service recommendations made by leading health organizations are made for “men” and for “women.” This language is not inclusive, and for people who are transgender, gender fluid, or gender expansive it might be difficult to read through recommendations without triggering gender dysphoria. As a result, we use the terms “people with a vagina/vulva” and “people with a penis” throughout this guide to hopefully make it easier for you to read and access information about what recommendations are right for you.

Transgender and gender fluid or gender-expansive individuals may also have specific health care needs that deserve personalized attention from a health care provider. For instance, you may have additional concerns, like how to find an inclusive health care provider or how gender-affirming surgery may or may not impact your body and the services you need.

As a result, we have compiled the resources below to help you access the information you need to achieve good sexual health.

It’s important to work with a health care provider you trust to identify the preventive services that are appropriate and recommended based on your anatomy and your risk factors. To learn more about transgender health and preventive services, check out [these additional resources](#) at the end of this guide.

Sexual Health for Trans Men

prevention.ucsf.edu/sites/prevention.ucsf.edu/files/inline-files/2013-0514_Web_Trans-Men-and-Sexual-Health_ENG.pdf

This brochure answers common questions about sexual health for trans men.

Sexual Health for Trans Women

prevention.ucsf.edu/sites/prevention.ucsf.edu/files/inline-files/2013-0514_Web_Trans-Women-and-Sexual-Health_ENG.pdf

This brochure answers common questions about sexual health for trans women.

Human Rights Campaign: Safer Sex for Trans Bodies

hrc.org/resources/safer-sex-for-trans-bodies

The HRC Foundation, in partnership with Whitman-Walker Health, released *Safer Sex for Trans Bodies*, a comprehensive sexual health guide for transgender and non-binary people and their partners.

GLMA Directory for LGBTQ+ Friendly Providers

glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=939

GLMA’s online Provider Directory can help those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer find a provider you can trust. Search for primary care providers, specialists, therapists, dentists, and other health professionals in your area.

What Sexual Health Services Do People with a Vagina/Vulva Need?

The following preventive services are recommended for people with a vagina/vulva. Your provider will help you decide which ones you need. Even if you don't have symptoms, screenings can detect many sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you do have an STI, the sooner you get treated, the better. Early treatment can often prevent serious problems from developing. Vaccines are also available that can protect you from getting certain STIs. And a provider can counsel you on contraceptive options to prevent pregnancy, if that is what you are interested in. You can receive many of these services during a regular wellness visit.

SCREENINGS

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

All sexually active individuals with a vagina/vulva who are aged 24 and younger should be screened annually for chlamydia and gonorrhea. Those aged 25 and older who have risk factors for STIs, such as having unprotected sex (sex without a condom), a new partner, or multiple partners, should also be screened for both chlamydia and gonorrhea.

Talk with your provider about being screened for syphilis. You may need to be screened if you have multiple partners, have HIV, have exchanged sex for money or drugs, or have been in prison.

All pregnant people should be screened for syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C during their first prenatal visit or within the first trimester. Pregnant people aged 24 and younger, as well as older pregnant people (aged 25 and over) with risk factors for STIs, should also be screened for chlamydia and gonorrhea. Those who are at continued risk for STIs should be retested for chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis B in their third trimester. For those who receive positive chlamydia and/or gonorrhea results, it is recommended to get retested 3 months after treatment.

Additionally, people with a vagina/vulva in high-risk settings and with other risk factors for STIs should consider being tested for trichomoniasis. This includes those with multiple sex partners, those exchanging sex for payment, those using illicit drugs, and those with a history

of STIs or incarceration. Those receiving care in high-prevalence settings (e.g., STI clinics and correctional facilities) may also consider testing.

HIV Testing

Everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 should be tested for HIV at least once as part of your routine health care, even if you have never had sex or you think your partner only has sex with you.

You should be tested at least once a year if you have unprotected sex, have had an STI or have a partner who has an STI, have multiple partners, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have partners who engage in any of these behaviors.

Cervical Cancer Screening

Starting at age 21, even if you haven't had vaginal sex, your health care provider should screen for cervical cancer and continue doing so until age 65. Screening means checking for a disease or for changes that might lead to disease. There are two types of testing that can screen for cervical cancer: the Pap test and the HPV test.

The Pap test looks at changes in cervical cells—caused by HPV—that might turn into cervical cancer, if not treated. An HPV test checks cells for infection with high-risk HPV types that can cause cervical cancer. The type and frequency of screening will depend on your age and health history.

People with a vagina/vulva should have their first Pap test at age 21. If the results are normal, they should have the

test every 3 years until age 29. If the results are not normal, your health care provider might recommend more frequent testing.

Those aged 30 to 65 can usually choose from 1 of 3 screening options: 1) HPV test every 5 years, 2) HPV/Pap test every 5 years, or 3) Pap test every 3 years. You may need to be screened more often if you've had an abnormal result. If so, talk with your provider.

People with a vagina/vulva who are HIV-positive should be screened for cervical cancer within 1 year of sexual activity or initial HIV diagnosis. Testing should be repeated 6 months later.

Remember, a Pap test does not test for STIs, nor does it test for other cancers of the reproductive system.

Even though you may not need annual screening, you should still see your provider regularly for checkups.

To learn more, visit

[cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm).



WOMEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH WOMEN

If you are a woman who has sex with women, you still need many of these preventive services. You can get chlamydia, gonorrhea, HPV, and other sexually transmitted infections from your female partners. You also need to be tested for HIV, especially if you or your partners had sex with men in the past or still do. The HPV vaccine will help protect you from getting cervical cancer, which is caused by the human papillomavirus.

Hepatitis B Screening

You should be screened for hepatitis B if you are pregnant, have a partner who has hepatitis B, have multiple partners, have had an STI, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), have HIV, or live with a person who is infected with the hepatitis B virus.

You should also be screened if you were born in a country where hepatitis B infection is common (Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, parts of South America) or were born in the United States to parents from one of those countries.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It is spread through infected body fluids, including blood and semen. Infection can either be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term). People with hepatitis B may not look or feel sick but can still infect others. Chronic hepatitis B infection can often be treated, but not cured.

To learn more, visit cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm.

Hepatitis C Screening

People with a vagina/vulva, aged 18 to 79, should be screened once for hepatitis C, and most people who are pregnant should be screened during each pregnancy.

Many “baby boomers” have hepatitis C and don’t know it. They may have engaged in risky behaviors or received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before national

screening for the virus was in place. Most people become infected with hepatitis C by sharing drug injection equipment. If you inject illegal drugs, you should be screened periodically for hepatitis C. You should also be screened if you’ve been in prison, have HIV, or have ever injected illegal drugs.

The risk of getting hepatitis C from having unprotected sex is low, but it is possible. You are at higher risk if you have HIV or another STI, have multiple partners, or engage in rough sex.

Hepatitis C is a virus that attacks the liver. It can cause severe illness and permanent liver damage. However, it can often be cured, especially if the infection is detected early.

To learn more, visit cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm.

Genital Herpes

Genital herpes is a very common sexually transmitted infection (STI). In fact, more than 1 in 6 people (aged 14 to 49) currently have it.

You can get genital herpes during anal, oral, or vaginal sex, or by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area with an infected partner. If you have herpes in your mouth, you can spread it to your partners genitals during oral sex.

Genital herpes is caused by two different viruses: HSV-1 and HSV-2. Most people with genital herpes have no symptoms or very mild symptoms. And many don't know they are infected. If you do have symptoms, herpes often appears as blisters or sores on or around your genitals, rectum, or mouth. Typically, as time goes on, people have fewer outbreaks, which are shorter and milder.

Routine screening for genital herpes is not recommended. However, testing is recommended for people:

- Who have genital symptoms.
- Who have (or have had) a sex partner with genital herpes.
- Who want a complete STI exam, especially if you've had multiple sex partners.
- Who are pregnant and have symptoms, or have a partner with genital herpes. Herpes can be life-threatening to babies, but the risk can be reduced if you are diagnosed. Talk with your health care provider about getting tested.

A health care provider may diagnose herpes by 1) simply looking at your symptoms 2) taking a sample from a sore and testing it 3) doing a blood test. Talk with your health care provider about what they recommend for you.

While there is no cure for herpes, effective medications are available that can prevent and shorten outbreaks, and reduce the risk of giving it to your partner(s). By avoiding sex during outbreaks and using condoms or dental dams every time you have sex, you can also reduce risk.

To learn more, visit cdc.gov/std/herpes/stdfact-herpes-detailed.htm.

Intimate Partner Violence

If your partner is sexually, verbally, or physically abusing you, or forcing you to do things against your will (such as getting pregnant, not using birth control, or engaging in unsafe sex), speak up and let your provider know. They can refer you to a program or mental health professional who can help you. Love is Respect (loveisrespect.org) and the National Domestic Violence Hotline (thehotline.org) also have resources, phone lines, and online chat support to help.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M AT RISK?

Your sexual health is at risk if you answer “yes” to any of the following questions:

- Have you had unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (sex without a condom)?
- Do you have multiple partners?
- Do you have an STI, including HIV?
- Have you shared injection drug equipment, including needles or syringes?
- Do you exchange sex for drugs or money?
- Do you have a partner who answers “yes” to any of these questions or whose health status you don't know?

VACCINES

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

This series of 2 shots is recommended for those aged 11–12 (but as early as age 9) before they've been exposed to HPV through sexual activity. The first dose is followed by the second dose 6–12 months later. (Children who start the vaccine on or after their 15th birthday might need 3 doses).

However, the vaccine is also recommended for people up to age 26 if not adequately vaccinated previously. Some individuals aged 27 to 45 may also benefit from being vaccinated. Talk to your provider to see if you're eligible and if it's right for you.

HPV is extremely common. Although most infections go away on their own, some types of HPV cause cancer, (including cervical, throat, anal, penile, vaginal, and vulvar) and other types of HPV cause genital warts.

The HPV vaccine protects against the most common types of HPV that cause genital warts and some cancers of the anus, penis, and throat.

To learn more, visit cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hpv/public/index.html.

Hepatitis B Vaccine

This 3-shot series is recommended for all unvaccinated people with a vagina/vulva, aged 0 to 18. Teens who have started, but not finished the series, should get the remaining doses in order to be fully protected against the hepatitis B virus. Unvaccinated adults with a vagina/vulva should get this vaccine series if they have multiple partners, a partner who has hepatitis B, have been diagnosed with HIV or another STI, have unprotected sex with a partner whose health status they don't know, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who injects drugs.

If you were born in a country where hepatitis B is common (Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, parts of South America) or were born in the United States to parents from one of those countries, talk to your provider about being

vaccinated. You may be given the first dose and tested for the virus at the same time.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It is spread through infected body fluids, including blood and semen. Infection can either be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term). People with hepatitis B may not look or feel sick but can still infect others. Vaccination is the best protection against hepatitis B. Not sure if you've been vaccinated? If you were born in the United States in 1991 or later, you were most likely vaccinated as an infant. Before 1991, the vaccine was only given to high-risk adults.

Hepatitis A Vaccine

This 2-shot series is recommended for all children 12 to 23 months old, and unvaccinated children and adolescents 2 to 18 years of age. Those who are missing the last dose should complete the series in order to be fully protected against hepatitis A. Adults with a vagina/vulva should get this vaccine series if their partner or someone they live with has hepatitis A, if they have HIV, or if they use illicit drugs.

The hepatitis A virus attacks the liver. There is no treatment for hepatitis A. While most people recover without permanent liver damage, they will probably feel very sick for a while. Not sure if you've been vaccinated? Routine vaccination began in 1999 so older teens and most adults have not been vaccinated.

To learn more, visit cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/aFAQ.htm.

COUNSELING

Contraception

Talk with your provider about your plans for having, or not having, children. Then they can provide information on the best contraceptive methods for you. Long-acting reversible contraceptives—the intrauterine device (IUD) and the implant—are among the easiest and most reliable methods for people who want to prevent pregnancy. Other available methods include injections, birth control pills, the vaginal ring, the patch, diaphragm, sponge, cervical cap, and internal or external condoms. Condoms are the only contraceptive method that prevent both pregnancy and STIs.

If you're done having children or know you don't want to have any children, permanent contraception (e.g., tubal ligation (also referred to as tying your tubes)) may be right for you. Natural family planning methods and abstinence (not having sex) are other options.

Emergency Contraception

If you have unprotected sex, your provider can also tell you about **emergency contraception (EC)**, or the “morning after pill.” EC can prevent pregnancy if taken within five days of having unprotected sex, and it's best to take it as soon as possible. EC can be available without a prescription at family planning clinics and some pharmacies. You can also ask your health care provider if they have it at their office. If you can't find it in stores, you can buy a generic version at [afterpill.com](https://www.afterpill.com).

Additionally, the Paragard copper IUD can be used as EC if inserted within 5 days of unprotected sex. Like other IUDs,

the Paragard copper IUD also provides continued protection against unwanted pregnancies for 10 years after insertion. The copper IUD is a non-hormonal option for a long-acting reversible contraceptive.

To learn more, visit plannedparenthood.org/learn/morning-after-pill-emergency-contraception/how-does-copper-iud-work-emergency-contraception.

STI Prevention

Using an external (“male”) or internal (“female”) condom every time you have sex is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of getting many STIs, including HIV. Other effective ways to protect yourself include abstinence (not having sex), engaging in lower risk sexual activities, or only having one partner who you know does not have an STI.

If you have sex without a condom, have an STI or recently had one, or have a new partner and are unsure of their health status, talk to your health care provider or a health educator. They can counsel you on ways to protect yourself and your partner from STIs, including whether medicines to prevent HIV infection are right for you.

People who do not have HIV but are at high risk of becoming infected can stay healthy by taking PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) might be prescribed if you think you've been exposed to HIV during sex; but, to be effective, it must be taken within 72 hours of possible exposure to HIV. Also, you can consult the resources at the end of this guide for more information about preventing STIs.



IT'S YOUR BODY!

You know your body better than anyone. Always tell your health care provider about any changes in your health. Speak to them about any concerns you may have about conditions, diseases, or issues related to sexual pleasure, functioning, or performance.

RECOMMENDED PREVENTIVE SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH A VAGINA/VULVA

Sexual Health Service	Adolescent (13 to 18 years)	Adult (19 and older)
Cervical cancer screening	Not recommended	Those aged 21 to 29 every 3 years Those aged 30 to 65 every 3 to 5 years Not recommended for those aged 66 and over
Chlamydia screening	Those who are sexually active (screen annually) or pregnant	Those age 24 and under (screen annually) Those age 25 and over who are at risk* Those who are pregnant, if 24 and under, or pregnant and at risk if aged 25 and over
Contraceptive counseling	Those who are sexually active	Those who are sexually active and/or of childbearing age
Counseling to prevent sexually transmitted infections	Those who are sexually active	Those who are at risk*
Gonorrhea screening	Those who are sexually active or pregnant	Those aged 24 and under (screen annually), including those who are pregnant Those aged 25 and over who are at risk, including those who are pregnant
Hepatitis A vaccine	Those not vaccinated as children	Those who are at risk* and are unvaccinated
Hepatitis B vaccine	Those not vaccinated as children	Those who are at risk* and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common
Hepatitis B screening	Those who are pregnant Those who are at risk and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common	Those who are pregnant Those who are at risk* and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common
Hepatitis C screening	Those who are age 18 Those who are pregnant	Those aged 19 to 79 Those who are at risk* or pregnant
Herpes	Those who have been exposed or are symptomatic	Those who have been exposed or are symptomatic
HIV testing	Those aged 13 and older (test at least once) Those who are pregnant	Those who are aged 19 to 64 (test at least once) Those who are at risk* (test at least annually) Those who are pregnant
HPV vaccine	Those not vaccinated at age 11 or 12	Those not vaccinated through age 26 (and eligible adults aged 27 to 45)
Syphilis screening	Those who are pregnant or at risk	Those who are pregnant or at risk*
Trichomoniasis	Not recommended	Those who are at risk or receiving care in high-risk settings (correctional facilities, STI clinics)

*You're at risk if you have had unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (sex without a condom), have multiple partners, have an STI (including HIV), share injection drug equipment (including needles or syringes), exchange sex for drugs or money, are incarcerated, or have a partner who answers "yes" to any of these questions or whose health status you don't know.

What Sexual Health Services Do People With a Penis Need?

The following preventive services are recommended for most people with a penis. Your provider will help you decide which ones you need. Even if you don't have symptoms, screenings can detect many sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you do have an STI, the sooner you get treated, the better. Early treatment can often prevent serious problems from developing. Vaccines are also available that can protect you from getting certain STIs. And a provider can counsel you on contraceptive options to prevent pregnancy, if that is what you and your partner(s) are interested in.

SCREENINGS

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Men who have sex only with women: You might consider being screened for chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis if you have unprotected sex, have multiple partners, or have a new partner and do not know their health status, even if you do not have any symptoms.

Men who have sex with men: If you are sexually active, you should be screened at least once a year for chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis, regardless of condom use. Depending on what types of sex you have, you could have chlamydia and gonorrhea infections not only in your genitals, but in your butt/anus or throat. You may need additional screening to find these infections, including throat or anal swabs. You should be screened every 3-6 months if you have unprotected sex, have had an STI or have a partner who has, have multiple partners, use illicit drugs, or have a partner who engages in any of these behaviors.

HIV Testing

Men who have sex only with women: You should be tested for HIV at least once as part of your routine health care, even if you have not had sex. You should be tested at least once a year if you have unprotected sex, have had an STI or have a partner who has had an STI, have multiple partners, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who engages in any of these behaviors.

Men who have sex with men: You should be tested for HIV at least once a year. You should be tested every 3 to 6 months if you have unprotected sex, have multiple partners, use illicit drugs, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who engages in any of these behaviors.

Hepatitis B Screening

Regular screening for hepatitis B is recommended for all men who have sex with men and those who share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), especially if they have not been vaccinated.

For all others, you should get tested if you are at increased risk, meaning you have unprotected sex, have had an STI or have a partner who has had an STI, have multiple partners, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who engages in any of these behaviors.

If you have a partner or family member who has hepatitis B, have multiple partners, or you have had an STI, you should be screened as well. Others who should be screened include those who were born in a country where hepatitis B infection is common (Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, parts of South America) or were born in the United States to parents from one of those countries.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It is spread through infected body fluids, including blood and semen. Infection can either be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term). People with hepatitis B may not look or feel

sick but can still infect others. Chronic hepatitis B infection can often be treated, but not cured.

To learn more, visit [cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm).

Hepatitis C Screening

Those aged 18 to 79 should be screened once for hepatitis C.

Many “baby boomers” have hepatitis C and don’t know it. They may have engaged in risky behaviors or received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before national screening for the virus was in place.

Most people become infected with hepatitis C by sharing drug injection equipment, including needles or syringes. If you inject illegal drugs, you should be screened periodically for hepatitis C. You should also be screened if you’ve been in prison, have HIV, or have ever injected illegal drugs.

The risk of getting hepatitis C from having unprotected sex is low, but it is still possible. Men who have sex with men and have multiple partners and/or engage in unprotected rough sex (specifically sex that can result in bleeding) are at higher risk.

Hepatitis C is a virus that attacks the liver. It can cause severe illness and permanent liver damage. However, it can often be cured, especially if the infection is detected early.

To learn more, visit [cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm).

Genital Herpes

Genital herpes is a very common sexually transmitted infection (STI). In fact, more than 1 in 6 people (ages 14 to 49) currently have it. You can get genital herpes during anal, oral, or vaginal sex, or by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area with an infected partner. If you have herpes in your mouth, you can spread it to your partners genitals during oral sex.

Genital herpes is caused by two different viruses: HSV-1 and HSV-2. Most people with genital herpes have no symptoms or very mild symptoms. And many don’t know they are infected. If you do have symptoms, herpes often

appears as blisters or sores on or around your genitals, rectum, or mouth. Typically, as time goes on, people have fewer outbreaks, which are shorter and milder.

Routine screening for genital herpes is not recommended. However, testing is recommended for people:

- Who have genital symptoms.
- Who have (or have had) a sex partner with genital herpes.
- Who want a complete STI exam, especially if you’ve had multiple sex partners.

A health care provider may diagnose herpes by 1) simply looking at your symptoms 2) taking a sample from a sore and testing it 3) doing a blood test. Talk with your health care provider about what they recommend for you.

While there is no cure for herpes, effective medications are available that can prevent and shorten outbreaks, and reduce the risk of giving it to your partner(s). By avoiding sex during outbreaks and using condoms or dental dams every time you have sex, you can also reduce risk.

Intimate Partner Violence

If your partner is sexually, verbally, or physically abusing you, or forcing you to do things against your will, talk to a health care provider mental health professional. They can refer you to a program or mental health professional who can help you. Love is Respect ([loveisrespect.org](https://www.loveisrespect.org)) and the National Domestic Violence Hotline ([thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org)) also have resources, phone lines, and online chat support to help.

VACCINES

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

This series of 2 shots is recommended for those aged 11 to 12 (but as early as age 9) before they’ve been exposed to HPV through sexual activity. The first dose is followed by the second dose 6-12 months later. (Children who start the vaccine on or after their 15th birthday might need 3 doses).

However, the vaccine is also recommended for people up to age 26 if not adequately vaccinated previously. Some

individuals aged 27 to 45 may also benefit from being vaccinated. Talk to your provider to see if you're eligible and if it's right for you.

HPV is extremely common. Although most infections go away on their own, some types of HPV cause cancer, (including cervical, throat, anal, penile, vaginal, and vulvar) and other types of HPV cause genital warts.

The HPV vaccine protects against the most common types of HPV that cause genital warts and some cancers of the anus, penis, and throat.

To learn more, visit cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hpv/public/index.html.

Hepatitis B Vaccine

This 3-shot series is recommended for all unvaccinated people with a penis aged 0 to 18. Teens who have started but not finished the series should get the remaining doses in order to be fully protected against the hepatitis B virus. All unvaccinated people with a penis should get this vaccine series if they have sex with men, have multiple partners, have a partner who has hepatitis B, have been diagnosed with HIV or another STI, have unprotected sex with a partner whose health status they don't know, share drug injection equipment (including needles or syringes), or have a partner who injects drugs.

If you were born in a country where hepatitis B is common (Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, parts of South America) or were born in the United States to parents from a high

prevalence country, talk to your provider about being vaccinated. You may be given the first dose and tested for the virus at the same time.

Hepatitis B is a virus that attacks the liver. It is spread through infected body fluids, including blood and semen. Infection can either be acute or chronic. People with hepatitis B may not look or feel sick but can still infect others. Vaccination is the best protection against hepatitis B. Not sure if you've been vaccinated? If you were born in the United States in 1991 or later, you were most likely vaccinated as an infant. Before 1991, the vaccine was only given to high-risk adults.

Hepatitis A Vaccine

This 2-shot series is recommended for all children aged 12 to 23 months, and unvaccinated children and adolescents aged 2 to 18 years. Teens who are missing the last dose should complete the series in order to be fully protected against hepatitis A. Unvaccinated people with a penis should get this vaccine series if they have sex with men, have a partner or live with someone who has hepatitis A, or if they use illicit drugs.

The hepatitis A virus attacks the liver. There is no treatment for hepatitis A. While most people recover without permanent liver damage, they will probably feel very sick for a while. Not sure if you've been vaccinated? Routine vaccination began in 1999 so most adults have not been vaccinated.

To learn more, visit cdc.gov/hepatitis/hav/afaq.htm.

YOU HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M AT RISK*?

Your sexual health is at risk if you answer "yes" to any of the following questions:

- Have you had unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (sex without a condom)?
- Do you have multiple partners?
- Do you have an STI, including HIV?
- Have you shared injection drug equipment, including needles or syringes?
- Do you exchange sex for drugs or money?
- Do you have a partner who answers "yes" to any of these questions or whose health status you don't know?

COUNSELING

Contraception

If you and your partner want to avoid pregnancy, learn about birth control methods both of you can use. The most effective options for people with a penis are using condoms correctly and consistently, abstinence (not having sex), engaging in lower-risk sexual activities (kissing, touching, massages), and vasectomy (permanent contraception). If you have sex with people with vaginas/vulvas, they have many more options to choose from. By learning about their preferred method, you can support their choice, and even offer to help pay for it if there's a cost involved.

Also learn about emergency contraception (EC), or the “morning after pill,” that can be used to prevent pregnancy if you had unprotected sex and your partner is able to become pregnant but does not want to. EC can prevent pregnancy if taken within five days of having unprotected sex, and it's best to take it as soon as possible. EC can be available without a prescription at family planning clinics, emergency rooms, and some pharmacies. You can also ask your health care provider if they have it at their office. If you can't find it in stores, you can buy a generic version at [afterpill.com](https://www.afterpill.com).

Additionally, the Paragard copper IUD can be used as EC if inserted within 5 days of unprotected sex. Like other IUD's, the Paragard copper IUD also provides continued

protection against unwanted pregnancies for 10 years after insertion. The copper IUD is a non-hormonal option for a long-acting reversible contraceptive.

To learn more, visit plannedparenthood.org/learn/morning-after-pill-emergency-contraception/how-does-copper-iud-work-emergency-contraception.

STI Prevention

Using an external (“male”) or internal (“female”) condom every time you have sex is one of the best ways to reduce the risk of getting many STIs, including HIV. Other effective ways to protect yourself include abstinence (not having sex), choosing lower risk sexual activities (kissing, touching, massages), or only having one partner who you know does not have an STI.

If you have sex without a condom, have an STI or recently had one, or have a new partner and are unsure of their health status, talk to your provider or a health educator. They can counsel you on ways to protect yourself and your partner from STIs, including whether medicines to prevent HIV infection are right for you. People who do not have HIV but are at high risk of becoming infected can stay healthy by taking a daily medication called PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) might be prescribed if you think you've been exposed to HIV during sex. Also, you can consult the resources at the end of this guide for more information about preventing STIs.



IT'S YOUR BODY!

You know your body better than anyone. Always tell your health care provider about any changes in your health. Speak to them about any concerns you may have about conditions, diseases, or issues related to sexual pleasure, functioning, or performance.

RECOMMENDED PREVENTIVE SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH A PENIS

Sexual Health Service	Adolescent (13 to 18 years)	Adult (19 and older)
Chlamydia screening	Those who are at risk	Those who are at risk* (including men who have sex with men)
Counseling to prevent sexually transmitted infections	Those who are sexually active	Those who are at risk*
Gonorrhea screening	Those who are at risk	Those who are at risk (including men who have sex with men)
Hepatitis A vaccine	Those not vaccinated as children	Those who are at risk*, including men who have sex with men, and unvaccinated individuals
Hepatitis B vaccine	Those not vaccinated as children	Those who are at risk* (including men who have sex with men) and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common
Hepatitis B screening	Those who are at risk (including men who have sex with men) and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common	Those who are at risk* (including men who have sex with men) and are unvaccinated Those born in a country where the hepatitis B virus is common
Hepatitis C screening	Those who are age 18	Those aged 19 to 79 Those who are at risk*
Herpes	Those who have been exposed or are symptomatic	Those who have been exposed or are symptomatic
HIV testing	Those aged 13 and older (test at least once)	Those who are aged 19 to 64 (test at least once) Those who are at risk* (test at least annually)
HPV vaccine	Those not vaccinated at age 11 or 12	Those not vaccinated through age 26 (and eligible adults aged 27 to 45)
Syphilis screening	Those who are at risk	Those who are at risk (including men who have sex with men) (test annually)

*You're at risk if you have had unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex (sex without a condom), have multiple partners, have an STI (including HIV), share injection drug equipment (including needles or syringes), exchange sex for drugs or money, are incarcerated, or have a partner who answers "yes" to any of these questions or whose health status you don't know.

What Types of Health Care Providers Address Sexual Health?

Described below are the types of health care providers who can provide sexual health care services and advice, along with where you can find them. For specific information about how to locate a provider near you, please consult the resources at the end of this guide.

Primary care providers, such as internists, family doctors, general medicine doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and nurse-midwives are trained in general medicine and to care for the whole body. They work in private doctors' offices, clinics, community health centers, family planning clinics, STI clinics, and college health systems. Even if they do not specialize in sexual health, they can be a good starting point and refer you to a specialist, if needed.

Specialists, such as obstetricians and gynecologists (OB/GYNs), urologists, and women's health nurse practitioners focus on women's and men's reproductive health. They work in private doctors' offices, community health centers, and family planning clinics.

Health educators work in clinics, community-based programs, schools, and colleges. They might offer sexual health counseling and educational materials to inform and equip people to make healthy decisions.

Pharmacists working in pharmacies, clinics, and community health centers, are experts about prescription and over-the-counter medications and can dispense birth control.

Mental health professionals, such as therapists, counselors, psychologists, social workers, sex therapists, and psychiatrists can address the emotional and mental health issues related to sexual concerns and problems. You will find them at college campuses, private practices, clinics, community health centers, and social service agencies.



How Can I Talk with My Health Care Provider about Sexual Health?

How do I bring up the topic?

Talking about your sexual health might make you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. However, if you talk openly and honestly with your provider about your body and concerns, they can give you better care and advice. You have the right to get full and accurate information about sexual health. And remember, it is your provider's job to help you take care of your whole body.

Here are some ways you could start the conversation:

"I just saw an article about high rates of sexually transmitted infections. What can I do to protect myself?"

"I know I'm here to get a check-up, but can we talk about my sexual health for a few minutes? I have some questions."

"I'm in a new relationship, and I'm not sure about the best ways to protect myself from infections and getting pregnant."

What kinds of questions should I ask?

The questions you might ask can cover a range of topics, including: the best forms of contraception, STI screening and treatment, preventing STIs, protecting your fertility, and issues related to sexual functioning or performance.

Sample questions you might ask during your visit:

Screening and Testing

- What tests are you giving me?
- How are they done?
- When and how will I get my results?

Sexually Transmitted Infections

- Based on my history, should I be tested for STIs, including HIV? Which ones?
- How often should I be tested for STIs?
- Should my partner get tested, too?
- Are there any vaccines I should get to protect myself from STIs?
- How can I protect myself from getting STIs?
- If I have an STI, can it be treated?

Contraceptives

- What are the most effective forms of birth control?
- What are the different and best options for me?
- What are the side effects of different contraceptives?
- How and where can I get affordable contraceptives?
- Are they covered by my insurance?

Partner Issues

- I want my partner and I to get tested for STIs before we have sex for the first time. How should I bring up the topic?
- How do I tell my partner if I test positive for an STI?
- What if my partner doesn't want to use a condom?
- I'm married and I assume my spouse is only having sex with me. Should I still be tested for STIs?
- My partner cheated on me and I'm worried I might have an STI. Which STIs should I be tested for?

Sexual Functioning or Performance

- I no longer find sex (or masturbation) pleasurable. Why?
- My sex drive is lower than normal. What's the deal?
- Having sex hurts. What's the problem?
- I'm being treated for another illness or disease, and I'm wondering how that will affect my sex life?
- I'm having trouble getting an erection/reaching climax. What's going on?
- I was told my prostate is enlarged. Will this affect my sex life?

What questions might my health care provider ask me?

Your provider might ask you questions that seem personal, but don't take it personally. They usually ask all of their patients the same questions. Answering these questions will give your health care provider information to help keep you healthy and safe.



Health care professionals might ask you the following questions about your sexual history and current behaviors:

- Are you sexually active? If no, have you ever been?
- Do you have sex with men, women, both, or another?
- What types of sex do you have (oral, vaginal, anal)?
- How many people have you ever had sex with? In the past 6 months? In the past 12 months?
- What are you doing to protect yourself from STIs?
- Have you been tested for STIs, including HIV? Would you like to be tested?
- Have you or your partner ever tested positive for an STI? If so, which one(s), and where was the infection found?
- Were you and/or your partner treated?
- Are you or your partner trying to get pregnant?
- Are you concerned about getting pregnant or getting your partner pregnant?
- Are you or your partner using contraception/birth control? Do you need any information about different types of contraception?
- Are you happy with your sex life? Do you have any concerns or questions about your sexual functioning?
- Have you ever been coerced or pressured to have sex or do something you didn't want to do?
- Do you or your partner use alcohol or illicit drugs when you have sex?

What to Look for in a Sexual Health Care Provider

Remember, a health care provider who takes good care of your sexual health should:

- Have a friendly and welcoming staff
- Speak clearly and use words you understand
- Put you at ease and listen to any sexual and reproductive health issues that are important to you
- Answer your questions and address your concerns in a helpful, respectful way
- Ask what your pronouns are and use them
- Ask permission before performing any tests
- Explain what they're doing and the reason why
- Keep your conversations confidential
- Support your right to make decisions about your sexual health care, based on your own values and what you believe is best for yourself

A health care provider should **NOT**:

- Assume to know your sexual behaviors or preferences without asking
- Be judgmental in response to your questions or concerns
- Be disrespectful of your sexual orientation, identity, or preferences
- Deny you care or treatment because of your sexual choices

If you feel uncomfortable with your health care provider for any reason, listen to your feelings. Ask your friends or family to recommend someone you can trust, research providers through an online rating site, or ask your health plan for a list of top-rated doctors in your area.



TAKE CHARGE

You can do many things to take charge of your sexual health. Make visiting a health care provider a priority. But, when you go for a visit, don't just rely on your provider. It's up to you to know which services you need and to make sure that you get them.

Schedule an appointment and get the services and advice you need to take care of your entire body, and to help you enjoy good sexual health for a lifetime.

Where to Learn More

TO FIND A PROVIDER OR CLINIC

Get Tested

gettested.cdc.gov

Use this site to find fast, free, and confidential testing locations near you. You can also learn which tests and vaccines you may need. Enter your zip code or city and state in the search box. It has a list of FAQs about HIV, viral hepatitis, and other STIs.

Health Resources and Services Administration

findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov

Use the search box to find a federally funded health center near you. These centers provide care even if you don't have health insurance. You pay what you can afford, based on your income.

National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics

nafclinics.org

Search for a free clinic near you using the 'Find a Clinic' feature on the home page. Free clinics typically provide primary care to those who are uninsured and low-income. Some may also provide specialty care and run pharmacies where you can get free medicine.

National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association

nationalfamilyplanning.org

To find a federally funded family planning clinic near you, click on 'Contact' then 'Find a Health Center' and enter your address or zip code in the search box.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

plannedparenthood.org

Find a local Planned Parenthood clinic by using the "Find a Health Center" search box on the home page. This

site provides a range of sexual and reproductive health information for men and women (including teens), plus resources for parents and educators.

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists

aasect.org

To find a sexuality educator, counselor, or therapist in your area, go to the 'Locate an AASECT Certified Professional' section on the home page.

American College of Nurse-Midwives

ourmomentoftruth.com

Nurse-midwives provide primary care to women of all ages, as well as maternity care to pregnant people. Go to 'Midwifery Care' and click 'Find a Midwife' to search for a midwifery practice near you.

American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

acog.org

Go to 'For Patients' and click 'Find an Ob-Gyn' on the right side of the page, then search by state, provider name, or zip code to find a physician. This site also provides information about women's sexual and reproductive health.

HIV, STIs, AND VIRAL HEPATITIS

American Sexual Health Association

ashasexualhealth.org

Go here to learn about various STIs and screening tests, as well as tips for having safe sex. This site also contains the HPV Resource Center and the Herpes Resource Center. Resources are available for parents, teachers, and health care providers.

The Complete HIV/AIDS Resource

thebody.com

Learn everything you need to know about HIV and AIDS.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

cdc.gov/std or

cdc.gov/hepatitis/PublicInfo.htm#whatIsHep

Visit the CDC's web site for information about STIs and viral hepatitis, as well as ways to prevent them.

Prevention Access Campaign

preventionaccess.org

Prevention Access Campaign is a health equity initiative to end the dual epidemics of HIV and HIV-related stigma by empowering people with and vulnerable to HIV with accurate and meaningful information about their social, sexual, and reproductive health.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network

rainn.org

This site can help survivors of sexual violence get the assistance they need. The National Sexual Assault Hotline (1-800-656-HOPE) is open 24/7.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

thehotline.org

Visit this site to learn about ways to safely leave an abusive relationship or to help someone who is in one. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is open 24/7: 1-800-799-SAFE or 1-800-787-3224 (for TTY).

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

nsvrc.org

Visit this site for resources tailored for survivors of sexual assault. The site also includes a [directory of organizations](#) that lists state and territory sexual assault coalitions,

victim/survivor support organizations, and local communities of color sexual assault organizations.

CONTRACEPTIVES

Bedsider Birth Control Support Network

bedsider.org

Explore different birth control methods and find one that's right for you. You can also search for nearby places to get birth control.

Condomology

factsaboutcondoms.com

Everything you need to know about condoms. Watch a video on how to put one on correctly and understand how condoms prevent different STIs, as well as pregnancy.

The Emergency Contraception Website

ec.princeton.edu

Learn about the types of emergency contraception and find a location where you can get it.

Planned Parenthood

plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control

Learn more about the different types of contraceptives and the birth control methods that may be right for you.

TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS

UCSF Center of Excellence for Transgender Health

prevention.ucsf.edu/transhealth

The Center of Excellence in Transgender health provides educational resources for transmen and transwomen.

The Fenway Institute

fenwayhealth.org

The Fenway institute provides educational materials for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Human Rights Campaign: Safer Sex for Trans Bodies

hrc.org/resources/safer-sex-for-trans-bodies

The HRC Foundation, in partnership with Whitman-Walker Health, released *Safer Sex for Trans Bodies*, a comprehensive sexual health guide for transgender and gender expansive people and their partners.

Sexual Health for Trans Men

prevention.ucsf.edu/sites/prevention.ucsf.edu/files/inline-files/2013-0514_Web_Trans-Men-and-Sexual-Health_ENG.pdf

This brochure answers common questions about sexual health for trans men.

Sexual Health for Trans Women

prevention.ucsf.edu/sites/prevention.ucsf.edu/files/inline-files/2013-0514_Web_Trans-Women-and-Sexual-Health_ENG.pdf

This brochure answers common questions about sexual health for trans women.

GLMA Directory for LGBTQ+ Friendly Providers

glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=939

GLMA's online Provider Directory can help those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer find a provider you can trust. Search for primary care providers, specialists, therapists, dentists, and other health professionals in your area.

TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS

Advocates for Youth

advocatesforyouth.org

Parents, educators, health care providers, and others will find information and resources to help teens and young adults make healthy sexual decisions.

Coalition for Positive Sexuality

positive.org

Provides information to young people about safe sex, contraception, STIs, parental consent laws, and more.

It's Your (Sex) Life

itsyoursexlife.com

Go here to get information about relationships, learn about various sexual health topics, and view a list of hotlines and resources.

I Wanna Know!

iwannaknow.org

This site provides guidance to help young people protect their sexual health, explains the changes that occur during puberty, and addresses misinformation about sex and STIs.

Scarleteen

scarleteen.com

This site provides sex education for teens and young adults. Read up on sex and sexuality, relationships, gender, and more.

Sex, Etc.

sexetc.org

Sexual health information for teens, by teens.

*It's time to give sexual health
the attention it deserves.*

