College students and STIs [1]

(1) Hey Alice,

What are the most common STDs among college students?

(2) Alice,

What are the average number of STDs on college campuses and the most common ones?

Answer

Dear Readers,

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or sexually transmitted infections [2] (STIs) are infections transmitted through sexual activity or behavior. Most college students are between the ages of 15 to 24 (most commonly 18 to 22), which has been found to be the group that is most susceptible to new STI infections. In fact, people in this age group acquire almost half of all new STIs every year, with individuals between the ages of 20 to 24 accounting for the highest infection rates. This annual increase of new infections can be explained by many sociocultural phenomena, including lack of sex education, insufficient access to safer sex materials, inability to pay for testing and treatment, discomfort with reproductive health facilities and services, and concerns regarding confidentiality. However, the risk of STI infection is palpable, and there are many ways you can protect yourself.

Although young adults are the age group most affected by new STI infections with approximately 9.5 million new cases each year, STIs do not discriminate on the basis of age. STIs affect individuals of all backgrounds, races, ethnicities, genders, and ages. With that said, according to the Center for Disease Detection, the following STIs are most common among college-aged young adults:

- One of the most common STI among people between the ages of 15 to 24 is chlamydia [3]. In fact, chlamydia is the most prevalent bacterial STI in the United States, with over 1 million new cases reported annually. Rates of reported chlamydia infections continue to increase steadily with time: between 2010 and 2011, chlamydia infection rates increased by 10.5 percent among women and 12.4 percent among men between the ages of 20 to 24.
- Also very common among the young adult population is herpes infection. Herpes Simplex Virus 1 (HSV-1), or oral herpes, is so common that epidemiologists believe it infects between 50 to 80 percent of adults in the United States. Herpes Simplex Virus 2
(HSV-2), or genital herpes, affects one in five college aged students in the United States.

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) affects many: there are approximately 5.5 million new cases of it every year, which accounts for 33 percent of all new STI infections annually. There are many strains of HPV, many of which show no symptoms. Fortunately, the Gardasil vaccine [4], which is recommended for everyone under the age of 26, protects against four strains of the virus, including two that cause warts and two others that are associated with the development of cervical cancer.

- Another prevalent STI among young adults in gonorrhea [5]. Between 2010 and 2011, gonorrhea infection increased 5.4% among women and 6.2 percent among men aged 20 to 24. Again, the young adult age group demonstrates the greatest increase in number of infections compared to all other age groups.

- Trichomoniasis, commonly referred to as ?trich,? is a parasitic STI that can be treated with antibiotics. It affects approximately 7.4 million previously uninfected individuals on a yearly basis, and is unusually difficult to detect in men.

- The last STI commonly found in young adults between the ages of 20 to 24 is syphilis. Syphilis presents in several stages: primary, secondary, and late or latent stages [6]. Syphilis is relatively rare, but infection rates are on the rise particularly among men within this age group. The shift of syphilis infection to younger adults reflects a trend; it used to be more common among men between the ages of 35 to 39, but now affects more college-aged men.

Many STIs are able to remain dormant and not show symptoms for years after infection occurs. This is true for both bacterial and viral infections. For example, up to 90 percent of individuals infected with HSV-1 or HSV-2 never exhibit symptoms. For this reason, you might consider undergoing a routine STI screening before having unprotected sex. Better yet, you and your partner can show each other your test results, which is the only fail proof way to tell if someone has an STI or not.

If you have any symptoms or test positive for an STI, don?t fret. Your doctor will help you decide how to treat the infection, and many STIs, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis can be treated with antibiotics. Although herpes cannot be completely cured, there are prescription medicines that can help reduce the frequency and severity of HSV-1 [7] and HSV-2 [8] breakouts.

If you think you might have an STD, find an STI clinic in your area [9] for testing and treatment.

Alice!
Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health [10]
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) [11]
General [12]

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