Dear Alice,

If you think you have an STD, what kind of doctor do you go to?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Good question! Fortunately, you have a few different types of health care providers and locations to choose from if you think that you might have been exposed to a sexually transmitted infection (STI), the newer term for a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Check out these options for STI testing and treatment:

- **STI Clinic**? You might contact the local office of your state’s public health department to find out if they run an STI clinic near you. For example, New York City has multiple free or low cost, confidential STI clinics available around the city. Another resource is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National STD and AIDS Testing Resources website; you can find where free and/or low cost clinics are located near you, as well as answer questions you may have about treatment, transmission, and prevention of STIs.

- **Planned Parenthood**? Women and men also have the option of going to a local Planned Parenthood health center for diagnosis and treatment of STIs. To find a health center in your area, visit the Planned Parenthood website, which also has information on STIs and other sexual health information.

- **College or university student health centers**? If you’re a student, you might try to make an appointment with a health care provider at your school’s health center. These providers are well-versed in the health needs of the student population and many offer STI testing services.

- **General health care provider**? Your health care provider may also do STI testing, treatment, and make referrals, if necessary.

- **Gynecologist**? Women may also go to a gynecologist or another women’s health care provider to be tested for STIs.

You might want to consider how comfortable you’ll feel with certain health care providers during the process of deciding who to see. If you’re concerned about being able to be open with your regular health care provider, you might consider visiting a health center such as Planned Parenthood. Being honest about what you might have been exposed to will help your health care provider determine the best course of testing and treatment if needed. Many
providers don't automatically test for STIs during a routine check-up? Typically, you would need to either tell her/him what you are concerned about, describe any symptoms you've noticed, or specifically request testing. You may also check into how much it costs to get tested for STIs at the different clinics; some locations in your area may offer services at no cost or on a sliding-fee scale. To determine whether or not cost will impact where to get tested, call ahead and make sure to ask about these options prior to sitting on the exam table.

While you're visiting a health care provider, why not take the opportunity to learn more about safer sex? You'll have an opportunity to discuss safer sex guidelines with the health care provider that you see, and learn ways to reduce your risk of contracting STIs. Another valuable resource is the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health [5] archive, which has many, many Q&As on safer sex and STIs.

Alice!
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