

What if I've been exposed to an STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease)?

Chances are you are reading this brochure for one of two reasons:

- 1) Someone you've had sex or shared needles with has told you he or she has an STD and you may have it, too.
- 2) A public health professional has told you someone who tested positive for an STD named you as a sex or needle-sharing partner.

Either way someone is concerned about your health and wants to be sure you do all you can to take care of yourself.

Naturally you have a lot of questions. This brochure is to help answer those questions, to make sure you know what to do next, and to let you know where to get more information.

What's the difference between exposed and infected?

If someone you spend a lot of time with has a cold; chances are you were *exposed* when they coughed or sneezed. You may have to wait many days before you know if you "caught" the cold. But if you start having symptoms—even if these are much different or milder than your friends—we know you have become *infected*.

With STDs, if you've had sex with someone who is infected, you've been exposed. We don't have to wait for symptoms. In fact, waiting risks serious health problems because many people with STDs don't know they are infected until they get sick. Instead, we try to do simple tests to see if you are infected with an STD *before* problems arise.

Okay, so am I infected?

The only way to know if you are infected is to go to a doctor's office or clinic and have the appropriate tests done. Even if you have had a recent exam, the specific tests were probably not performed.

Because different STDs need different tests and treatment, it is very important for you to tell whoever examines you *which* STD you may have been exposed to. For example, "I had sex with someone who has chlamydia." This information will help the doctor know which tests need to be done.

Because STDs can lead to serious, even life-threatening, conditions, your clinician may suggest you get treated without waiting for test results.

But I don't have any symptoms?!

It's good if you don't have symptoms; they are no fun. But it doesn't mean you are free from infection. Many people who are infected have no idea anything is wrong. Meanwhile, they can pass the STD on to others and serious damage to their own reproductive system may also be happening.

So what do I do now?

Go to your doctor, health center or public health clinic and tell them you may have been exposed to an STD. Ask the person who gave you this brochure to help you identify the choices available. *If* you go to the same provider who treated your partner, all information will still be kept confidential. Your information stays private to you; your partner's information stays private to him/her.

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What kind of tests are we talking about?

Some tests require a blood sample, some require an examination. Each STD has its own tests, so be sure to tell your clinician which STD you may have. Since people sometimes have more than one STD at a time, your clinician should test you for several STDs at the same visit.

I can't believe this is happening to me!

You are not alone. One in three sexually active people will have an STD by the time they are 24. Many of them find out because someone tells them, "I've been to the clinic and had a positive test. You should be tested, too."

It is almost always upsetting. People can feel frightened, embarrassed or just numb. It is easy to be angry with your partner. It may be useful to remember that your partner told you, or made sure the health department could tell you, because he or she was concerned about your health. That took a lot of courage.

It is important to remember that just because your partner was tested first, doesn't mean he or she had the infection first. There is usually no way of knowing who gave it to whom.

To avoid reinfection, **don't have sex** until you and all your partners have finished all your medications!