


Empowering School Nurses: Effective STI Prevention Communication Strategies

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Who Am I?

- **DSSUS Mission:** *to prevent and reduce the incidence of HIV, STDs, TB, and substance use related harms, and ensure that individuals affected by or at risk of these conditions have access to the care they need.*
 - The Division uses its resources to help community-based networks deliver high-quality, comprehensive services that meet the language and cultural needs of the people they serve, providing holistic support for all individuals.
 - The Division embraces a “**syndemic**” approach to HIV, STDs, TB, and substance use.
 - This means preventing and treating these conditions together at the same time and in the same communities.
 - Often, they interact and make each other worse, especially where poverty, stigma, and poor access to care are concentrated.
- I received my Master’s in Public Health from Drexel University and have spent the last 20 years working for governmental health departments
 - Philadelphia Department of Public Health from 2006-2018
 - New Jersey Department of Health since 2018



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Things I Have Heard...

- **17-year-old:** I can't believe I am pregnant! I thought I couldn't have a baby because I have been having sex for two years and have never gotten pregnant before.
- **Question:** Before this time, have you ever had gonorrhea before?
Answer: Yes...
A few minutes later: You know, when I had gonorrhea the last time, my doctor called it chlamydia.
- **Question:** When was the last time you had sex?
Answer: Never
<person has an STI>
Press more and they only have oral sex, which they don't consider sex.
- **But they're a good kid...**



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Agenda

- Review current disease trends in New Jersey
- Discuss ways to have information available to students
- Provide resources to help you answer students' questions

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STI vs. STD

- Sexually transmitted infection (STI) is the preferred term as not all sexual infections cause a noticeable disease with symptoms.
- More than 30 different bacteria, viruses and parasites are known to be transmitted through sexual contact, including vaginal, anal and oral sex.

Types of STIs

• Bacterial STIs:

- **Chlamydia:** A very common STI, often with no symptoms
- **Gonorrhea:** Another common bacterial STI, often asymptomatic
- **Syphilis:** Can cause sores, rashes, and other symptoms, and if left untreated, can lead to serious health problems

• Viral STIs:

- **Genital herpes (HSV):** Causes painful sores or blisters
- **Human papillomavirus (HPV):** Can cause genital warts and is linked to cervical cancer
- **HIV:** Leads to **AIDS**, a condition that weakens the immune system
- **Hepatitis B:** Can lead to liver damage and cancer



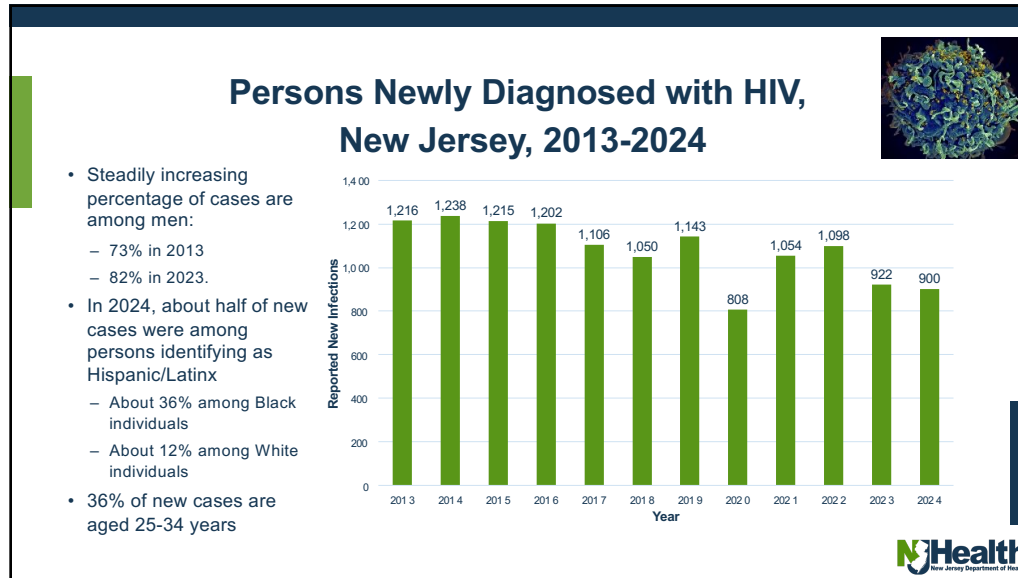
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Other STIs

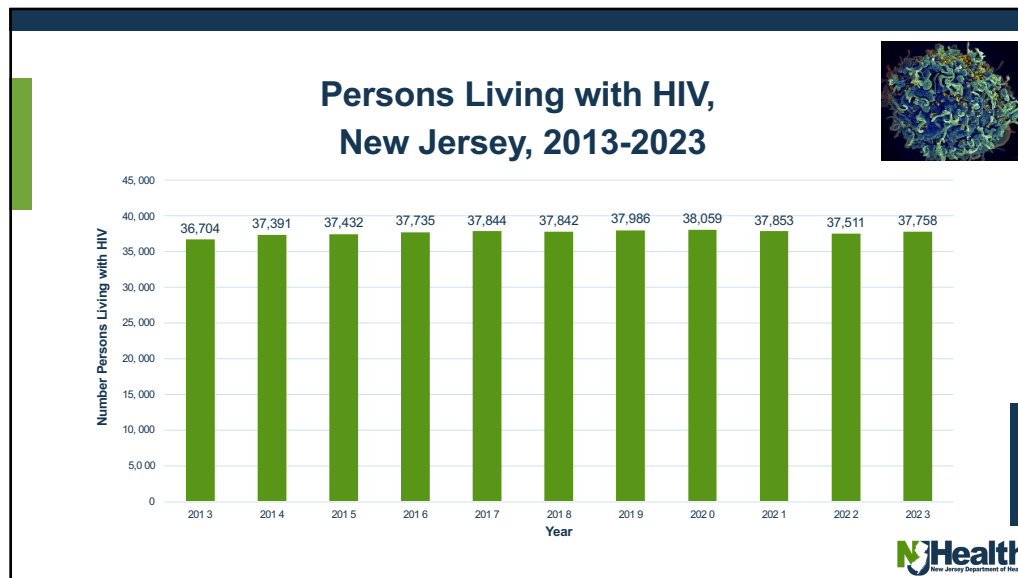
- **Trichomoniasis:** Caused by a parasite and can cause itching and discharge
- **Scabies:** A skin infestation caused by mites
- **Pubic lice:** Also known as 'crabs,' these are tiny insects that live in pubic hair.
- **Mycoplasma genitalium:** A bacterial STI that can cause inflammation and discharge
- **Bacterial vaginosis (BV):** An imbalance of bacteria in the vagina
- **Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID):** An infection of the female reproductive organs
- And so many more infections can be STIs!
 - Bacteria like *Shigella*
 - Viruses like Mpox, Ebola, and Zika



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What do my lab results mean? HIV and Laboratory Tests

You want your CD4 count to be HIGH

CD4 Cell Count

CD4 cells are specialized cells of the immune system destroyed by HIV. A CD4 cell count measures how many CD4 cells are in your blood. The higher your CD4 cell count, the healthier your immune system.

CD4 cells

HIV

HIV Viral Load Test

An HIV viral load test, also called an HIV RNA test, tracks how many HIV particles are in a sample of your blood. This is called your viral load.

You want your viral load to be LOW

Taking a combination of HIV medicines every day prevents HIV from destroying CD4 cells and helps lower your viral load.

What are some other important tests?

DRUG RESISTANCE TEST

HIV can change form, making it resistant to some HIV medicines. A drug resistance test helps your health care provider choose the HIV medicines that will work for you.

TESTS FOR OTHER INFECTIONS

HIV weakens the immune system, leaving people vulnerable to other infections. Health care providers test for tuberculosis, hepatitis B and C infections, and other potential illnesses. The treatment for another infection may affect HIV treatment.

COMPLETE BLOOD COUNT

This test measures how many red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets are in your blood. This helps health care providers keep track of your overall health and spot infections or other potential medical problems.

BLOOD CHEMISTRY TESTS

This group of tests measures several different chemicals in your blood to help monitor the health of your organs, especially your heart, liver, and kidneys. Health care providers use blood chemistry tests to look for side effects caused by HIV medicines.

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1-6 months to BECOME undetectable after starting treatment

6 months to STAY undetectable after first undetectable test result

Can't pass HIV through sex as long as you stay undetectable:

- Take medications daily
- See your health care provider regularly to monitor your test results

Undetectable Equals Untransmittable

health.mn.gov/endhivmn

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Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)

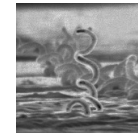
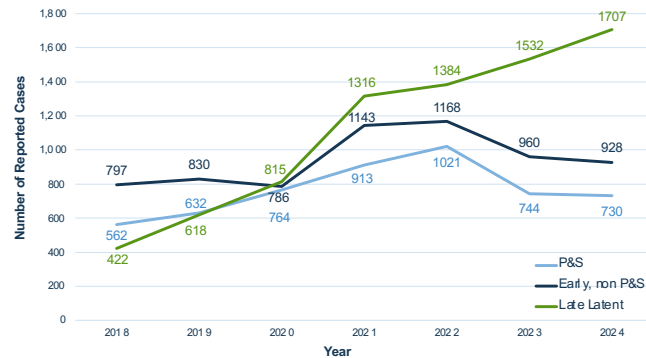
- A person living with HIV who is on treatment and maintains an undetectable viral load CANNOT transmit HIV to their sexual partners.
- Often, people living with HIV have their viral load tested to see how well the medications are working.
 - Many people think that because they are “undetectable,” they are cured.
 - There is no cure for HIV – yet!
 - Taking medications daily ensures they are “undetectable.”
 - HIV is not a death sentence anymore – people are living normal lives and now must be concerned with heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer...



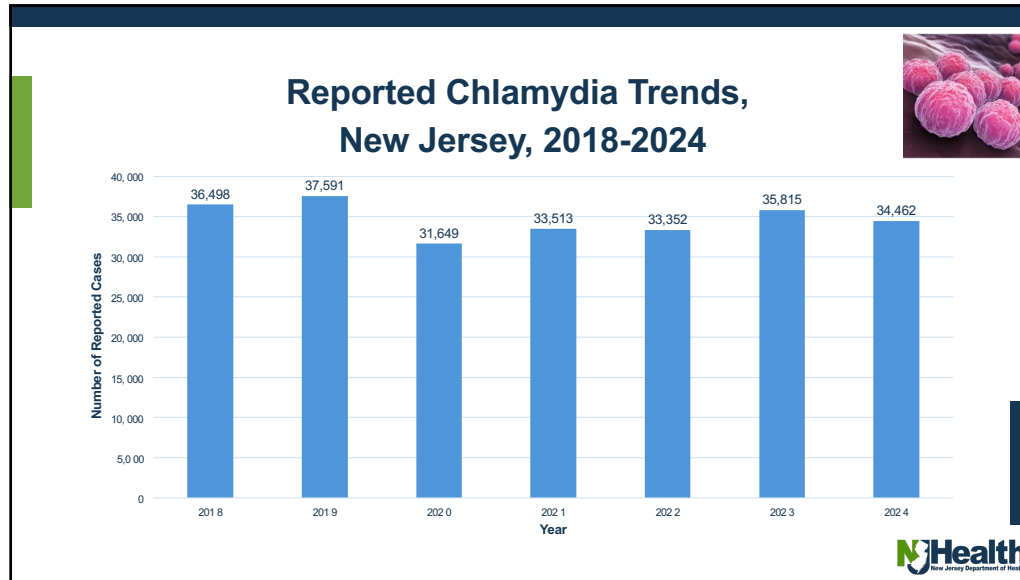
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Syphilis Trends, New Jersey, 2018-2024

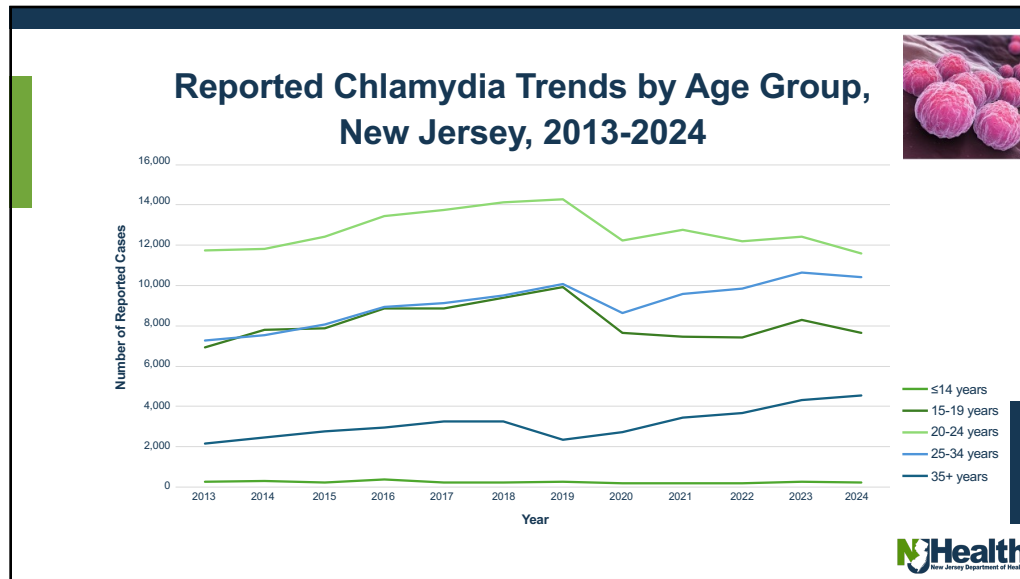
- Early syphilis includes primary and secondary (P&S) and early, non P&S (formerly called early latent). All are infectious.
- Cases of P&S and early, non-P&S started declining in Sept. 2022



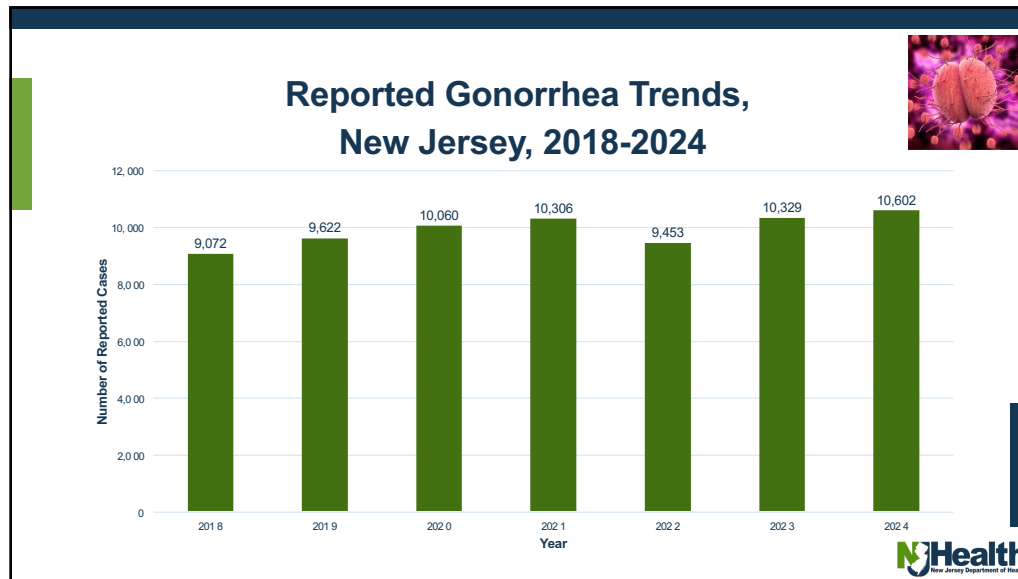
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NJ State Health Assessment Data (NJ SHAD)

- Like to Slice and Dice?
 - www-doh.nj.gov/doh-shad/query/selection/hiv/HIVSelection.html
 - www-doh.nj.gov/doh-shad/query/selection/std/STDSelection.html
- Able to limit to your community/county
 - Must have more than ten reported cases to show data

Let's walk through a scenario together!

NJHealth
New Jersey Department of Health

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Talk to Students About Their Sexual Health

“Ironically, it may require greater intimacy to discuss sex than to engage in it.”

- Institute of Medicine, The Hidden Epidemic: Confronting Sexually Transmitted Diseases, 1999



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Talk to Students About Their Sexual Health (Tips)

Create a welcoming environment

- Pictures, posters, magazines, etc.
 - Have an anonymous question box
- Talk in a private, comfortable space
 - No assumptions, question your assumption
 - Open-ended questions
 - Be mindful of your facial expressions/body language
- Practice reflective listening
 - Repeat back what you heard
 - Ask for clarity
 - Summarize the conversation
- Assure confidentiality
- Have privacy screens on computers to ensure confidentiality
- Practice, practice, practice
 - Make the words familiar so you aren't hesitant



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How to Prevent HIV and Other STIs?

Abstinence

Condoms


Medications

- For HIV – Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)
- For STIs (mainly syphilis and chlamydia) – doxycycline post exposure prophylaxis (doxyPEP)



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PrEP vs. PEP		
PrEP stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis.	What's it called?	PEP stands for post-exposure prophylaxis.
Before HIV exposure. PrEP is taken before sex, drug use, or other HIV exposure.	When is it taken?	After HIV exposure. In emergency situations, PEP is started within 72 hours after possible exposure, and taken for a month thereafter.
PrEP is for people who don't have HIV and: • are at risk of getting HIV from sex • are at risk of getting HIV from injection drug use	Who's it for?	PEP is for people who don't have HIV but may have been exposed: • during sex • during a sexual assault • at work through a needlestick or other injury • by sharing injection drug equipment
Consistent use of PrEP can reduce the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99% and from injection drug use by at least 74%.	How effective is it?	PEP can prevent HIV when taken correctly, but it is not always effective. Start PEP as soon as possible to give it the best chance of working.
Ask your health care provider about a prescription for PrEP, or use PrEPlocator.org to find a health care provider in your area who can prescribe PrEP.	How do you get it?	Within 72 hours after potential exposure to HIV, get a PEP prescription from your health care provider, urgent care, or an emergency room.
For more information, visit HIVinfo.NIH.gov .		



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Doxy PEP

- Take 200 mg (two 100 mg pills) of doxycycline within 24 hours (for greatest effect) but no later than 72 hours after condomless sex.
 - Condomless sex means oral, anal, vaginal, or front-hole sex when a condom is not used for the entire time.
- nj.gov/health/hivstdtb/documents/DoxyPEP-Quick-Facts-for-Patients.pdf

Efficacy Data

Researchers from the University of California recently conducted a [randomized trial](#) of DoxyPEP for the prevention of syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhea. Study participants included cisgender men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women who were either taking HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) or living with HIV (PLWH). All had been diagnosed with an STI in the past year. Participants in the intervention arm received a single dose of 200 mg doxycycline administered within 24–72 hours after condomless sex. The trial ended early due to the high efficacy observed, and no significant adverse reactions attributable to doxycycline were noted among trial participants.*



The efficacy of DoxyPEP against other bacterial STIs is not known. DoxyPEP does not prevent HIV, mpox, or other viral infections such as human papillomavirus (HPV) or herpes simplex virus (HSV).

* Source: Luetkenmeyer et al. Postexposure Doxycycline to Prevent Bacterial Sexually Transmitted Infections. *N Engl J Med* 2023 Apr; 388:1296-1306.



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Fact vs. Myth

- **"Pull-out method is a reliable form of contraception"**
 - Myth: Many TikTok videos suggest that the pull-out method is an effective way to prevent pregnancy.
 - Fact: While the pull-out method can reduce the risk of pregnancy, it is not as reliable as other contraceptive methods like condoms or hormonal birth control. The failure rate is significantly higher.
- **"You can't get pregnant during your period"**
 - Myth: Some creators claim that having sex during menstruation eliminates the chance of pregnancy.
 - Fact: Although the chances are lower, pregnancy can still occur if ovulation happens soon after the period ends, as sperm can survive in the body for several days.
- **"Douching is necessary for vaginal cleanliness"**
 - Myth: There's a misconception that douching is required for good vaginal hygiene.
 - Fact: Douching can disrupt the natural balance of bacteria and pH levels in the vagina, potentially leading to infections. The vagina is self-cleaning, and douching is generally not recommended.



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Fact vs. Myth, continued

- **"Emergency contraception is an abortion pill"**
 - Myth: Some videos incorrectly label emergency contraception as an abortion method.
 - Fact: Emergency contraception, like Plan B, prevents pregnancy before it occurs and does not terminate an existing pregnancy.
- **"Condoms are 100% effective in preventing STIs and pregnancy"**
 - Myth: The belief that condoms provide absolute protection is sometimes propagated.
 - Fact: While condoms significantly reduce the risk of STIs and pregnancy, they are not 100% effective due to factors like improper use or breakage.
- **"You can't get an STI if you only have oral sex"**
 - Myth: Some believe that oral sex is completely safe in terms of STI transmission.
 - Fact: STIs like herpes, gonorrhea, and syphilis can be transmitted through oral sex.
- **"You can tell if someone has an STI by looking at them"**
 - Myth: There is a misconception that physical appearance can reveal if someone has an STI.
 - Fact: Many STIs can be asymptomatic, meaning individuals may not show any visible signs.



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TikTok, Insta, and Other Social Media

- There is A LOT of misinformation on TikTok, Instagram, and other social media.
 - People get so much misinformation/advice/knowledge from TikTok and other social media sites
 - This is a trusted source, especially for teens
- Do you have the capacity to debunk some videos via your social media? Do you have teens looking for community service project?



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Age to Consent for Testing

- No parental permission is needed to test and treat for STIs/HIV after a child turns 13 years old.
- Insurance
 - Explanation of benefits (EOBs) is sent to the primary cardholder (i.e., mom or dad)
 - Kids can stay on their parents' insurance until they are 26 years old
 - Can be a barrier to STI testing, PrEP initiation, etc.



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What Should I Know?

- Where is the nearest medical provider that would see your patrons?
 - Can you create signage “advertising” the clinic?
 - Do you have a “community resource directory” on your website? Can you find it?
 - Does it have a sexual health tab?
 - Stigma-free messaging: Did you know that you can seek free or low-cost medical services from <enter clinic name>?
 - FQHCs, family planning clinics, local health departments.
- Who is my local health department?
 - Localhealth.nj.gov
- What is your plan if the information given is beyond your scope?
- Do you have any restrictions on what people can search for on the internet?
- With so much disinformation, what are the trusted resources I should use?



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Resources

- [cdc.gov/sti/about/index](https://www.cdc.gov/sti/about/index)
- [cdc.gov/hiv/index](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/index)
- [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-\(stis\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-(stis))
- nj.gov/health/sti
- nj.gov/health/hiv
- endhivnj.org



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Resources

- sexpositivefamilies.com/resources - Sex Positive Families provides education and resources that help families raise sexually healthy children using a shame-free, comprehensive, and pleasure-positive approach.
- ashasexualhealth.org/explore-ashas-sexual-health-resources - The American Sexual Health Association (ASHA) empowers individuals, families, and communities to achieve sexually healthy lives through education and advocacy.
- sexetc.org - *Sex, Etc.* is published by [Answer](https://www.answer.org), a national organization that provides and promotes unfettered access to comprehensive sexuality education for young people and the adults who teach them.
- scarleteen.com - One of the first and remain one of the few websites and organizations focused on directly providing sex, relationships and bodies information and support for and to young people.



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Resources

- answer.rutgers.edu - Honest, accurate information and resources for educators, adults, parents, and professionals about sexuality and sexual health
- nsvrc.org - Information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence
- healthysexuals.com - Information and support on being proactive about protecting sexual health
- plannedparenthood.org/learn - Information, resources, and sexual health care
- widener.edu/about/faculty-directory/brent-satterly - Brent A Satterly, PhD, MSS, LCSW, CSE, Professor at Widener University School of Social Work. Email is best way to reach him.



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Division of Syndemic and Substance Use Services

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