

OPINION

Commentary: Tests are key to managing STDs

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By Dr. Lennard R. Gildiner

(Photo: Getty Images)

April is National STD Awareness Month. Did you know that one in two sexually active young people in the U.S. will contract a sexually transmitted disease by the time they're 25 — and that most won't even know it? Or that young people account for the largest percentage of new HIV infections in the U.S. each year?

Many sexually active young people may not realize that getting tested is part of basic preventive health care. But in fact, STDs continue to disproportionately affect young people. Half of the estimated 20 million sexually transmitted diseases in this country each year occur in people under 25, even though they represent only 25 percent of the sexually active population.

That's why Planned Parenthood of Southern New Jersey has joined with MTV, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and other organizations for the sixth year of the award-winning Get Yourself Tested campaign. GYT is a national campaign that includes on-air, online and on-the-ground activities designed to promote sexual health among young people and address the disproportionately high rates of STDs — including HIV, chlamydia and gonorrhea — among those under 25.

During last year's GYT campaign, our affiliate provided 475 STD tests at our service sites in Atlantic, Burlington and Camden counties.

This year, during April, we will offer low-cost STD testing and will mark the month by conducting education sessions at schools and other community venues.

A few things young people should know about getting tested and STDs:

- Getting yourself tested for STDs is one of the most important things you can do to protect your health. STDs, if not treated, can lead to serious health outcomes such as increased risk of cervical cancer and infertility.
- Getting tested is easy, quick and painless. For example, rapid HIV tests can provide results in 20 minutes from just a swab in the mouth. For other tests, all you have to do is urinate in a cup. No needles necessary.
- The good news is that most STDs, including HIV, are treatable, and many are curable. The sooner you know your status, the sooner you can get treated. Not all medical checkups include STD testing — so unless you ask to be tested, don't assume you were the last time you saw your doctor.
- You can't tell by looking at someone if they have an STD. Many STDs cause no symptoms. For example, 75 percent of women and 50 percent of men with chlamydia have no symptoms. On average, people with HIV don't develop symptoms for 10 years.

The only way to know your status for sure is to get tested. Contact us at www.ppsnj.org or (856) 365-3519 to schedule an appointment. To learn more about STDs and testing, visit the Get Yourself Tested website at www.GYTnow.org.

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able STD testing, treatment, and sex education and information to help ensure that
the rates of sexually transmitted infections — and our doors are open to everyone.

This April, spread the word that STD testing should be a routine part of your health care checkups — especially if you're a sexually active young person. It's one of the easiest and most important things you can do to protect your health.

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