

# TALK, TEST, TREAT: STI AWARENESS

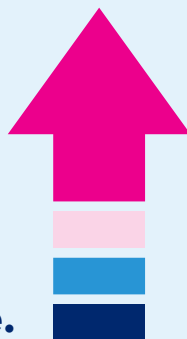
## Every day, we champion safer sex for all.

Central to nearly all our patient visits are STI testing, screening, and education. Our non-judgmental providers dismantle STI stigma, celebrate sex positivity, streamline care, and offer revolutionary preventive medications. **LA County's STI rates have been increasing for a decade.** Learn how your local Planned Parenthood has been confronting this crisis, and how you can too.



## THE FACTS

LA County cases  
of congenital  
syphilis (CS)  
have increased  
**1600%**  
in the last decade.



*CS occurs when syphilis is passed to a baby during pregnancy. It can cause serious health problems including miscarriage, low birth weight, and stillbirth.*

Adolescents & adults in  
their early 20s account for  
about **half of new STI cases**  
annually but comprise only  
a quarter of the sexually  
active population.

Last year, we provided  
**135,076** STI tests.



## What's an STI?

STIs (sexually transmitted infections) are bacterial or viral infections that can be passed through bodily fluids, direct skin-to-skin contact, or anal, vaginal or oral sex with an infected partner. While less likely, it's also possible to get STIs through contact that isn't sexual. Some can be transmitted from parent to baby during pregnancy or birth or through sharing needles. **STIs are common and can impact anybody.** One in two sexually active people will experience a STI by age 25.

## Don't call it a disease!

Using the term STD (sexually transmitted disease) can contribute to **stigma and misinformation.** *Disease* happens when an infection causes symptoms, damages parts of your body, and leads to illness. *Infection* happens when a virus, bacteria, or parasite enters your body, and your immune system kicks in to fight it. **Most of the time, STIs will never become diseases.**

Here's the thing: "STD" has been around much longer. More people use this term and search for it on the internet. This is why you may see "STD" on our website. We want information to be easily searchable for those who need it, but **we encourage thoughtful, accurate use of these terms.**

# A PILL THAT CAN PREVENT HIV?

## The revolutionary medications PEP & PrEP

Nearly 60,000 people across LA County live with HIV, and there are about 1,400 new HIV transmissions here every year. A cornerstone of all public health efforts to end HIV is prevention, and in recent years, two medications have changed the landscape of HIV prevention.

**PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis)** is a daily pill or bimonthly injection that can reduce the chance of acquiring HIV by up to 99%. Think of PrEP almost like birth control but preventing HIV instead of pregnancy.

**PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)** is a month-long prescription started within 72 hours of possible HIV exposure. Much like the morning-after pill is taken to prevent pregnancy, PEP is a time-sensitive medication that can stop HIV infection.

PPPSGV has offered these life-changing medications at all health centers since 2018. Last year, we wrote **391 PEP and PrEP prescriptions**, but our care does not stop there. Our Care Team works with local pharmacies to ensure seamless prescription fulfillment and to connect patients with prescription payment assistance.



## Beyond HIV with DoxyPEP

New evidence suggests that taking a one-time dose of the antibiotic doxycycline within 72 hours of unprotected sex significantly reduces chances of contracting chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. Known as DoxyPEP, this new preventive medication is now offered at all of our health centers.

## END THE STIGMA

STIs are a common part of life. Like with colds, flus, and other infections, you can do your best to protect yourself, but sometimes they happen. An STI diagnosis—or the lack of one—does not make someone “dirty” or “clean.”

Negative and unhealthy attitudes about sex create stigma that is harmful to everyone. All people should feel comfortable and safe talking about STI transmission, treatment, and prevention. When someone is sick, they need care, not criticism.



# FASTER ACCESS & PEACE OF MIND

**A conversation with Laboratory Manager Maria (she/her)**

**We opened our first in-house lab at our Baldwin Park Health Center in 2022. We chatted with Maria to learn more about how her team helps to address the STI epidemic.**

## What led you to your role as Laboratory Manager?

Planned Parenthood has always been near and dear to my heart. I used it when I was a youth with no health insurance to get low-cost birth control and well-person appointments—everything that people go to Planned Parenthood for now. When the Laboratory Manager position opened up, I was like, you know what, let's see. It's been wonderful to work with people who are all about the mission and caring for our patients.

## How is the lab helping patients?

An in-house lab allows us to send patients their results within 24 hours, compared to the 5 to 8 day wait for external labs. This means more peace of mind and faster access to treatment. Our lab also generates revenue that we can use to further invest in our health centers. In every way, the lab makes it more convenient for patients to come back to see us and get tested over and over again, which really gives us a clear picture of how STIs are moving through the community.

## Can you talk about the role of the lab in curbing the STI epidemic?

According to the World Health Organization, over 1 million STIs are acquired every day. Most of these are asymptomatic, so like with all communicable diseases, the easiest way to track infection rates is through screening and testing. This work really is a cornerstone of the community. Our patients feel safe at Planned Parenthood, and this is often the only form of health care they get. The more we are testing, treating, and providing education, the closer we are to stopping the spread.

**SAFER  
IS SEXY**  
**Do Your Part  
to Stop the  
Spread**



### Get Tested

Most of the time, STIs cause NO symptoms, so it's important to test regularly, including before and after every new sexual partner.



### Get Treated

Having an STI can be serious, but it doesn't have to be scary. Most STIs are curable and all STIs are treatable.



### Prioritize Prevention

Using a barrier, like condoms or dental dams, is one of the best ways to protect against STIs.

# HOW OUR COMMUNITY EDUCATORS TALK ABOUT STIs



## Zarreah, Community Health Educator (she/her)

"Before teaching about STIs, it's important that someone understands the basic anatomy of their bodies. **I once taught a group of moms that didn't understand where an STI came from.** Making our community aware of how STIs are contracted and can be prevented is an essential part of my work."

## Zoe, Community Health Educator (she/her)

"Culture is a large component of teaching sex ed. Being aware that **youth may not feel free to have these sorts of conversations with their parents or other family members, so they rely on Dr. Google or their peers.** During the lessons we're able to be that trusted adult at that time to answer any questions they have without judgement."



## Alex, Community Health Educator (they/them)

"Teaching STIs can be difficult because the instruction can easily become very science specific. **We'll use analogies instead of technical terms.** Like with Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV), for instance. Some people have a hard time understanding HSV of the mouth versus HSV of the genitals. So we have a metaphor. I'll say that the different types of HSV are like how different kinds of plant life grow in different environments."

*Drawings of Alex and Zarreah by a former student.*

## IN THIS TOGETHER



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