

Take Action — Stop the Spread

How to Take a Sexual History and Provide Brief Counseling

1 Take a sexual history from all patients, starting at 11 years of age.

General Approach

- Protect Confidentiality. Assure your patients that you will not share information with parents, partners, or others about sexual behaviors or sexually transmitted infections. (Notable exceptions include sexual abuse or rape of a minor)
- Be sensitive, non-judgmental and direct.
- Use simple, age- and culturally-appropriate language. Encourage questions.
- Revisit the patient's sexual history at least annually.

What to Ask

Sexual health is an important part of general health, so I always talk to my patients about it. I'd like to ask a few questions:

1. **Are you sexually active?** Use other terms to clarify "sex" and "sexual activity" if necessary.
2. **Do you have sex with men, women, or both? Do you have oral sex, vaginal sex, anal sex?** Information about the types of sex and partners helps guide which STIs to test for, and which sites to test.
3. **Have you ever had a sexually transmitted infection?** Previous infection = higher risk.
4. **Do you know your HIV status?** Offer HIV testing routinely to all patients between the ages of 13 and 64.
5. **Do you use condoms? How often? For which types of sex?** Condoms protect against pregnancy and most STIs, including HIV.
6. **Do you want to become pregnant (or father a child)?** If not, what kind of birth control method do you use?
7. **Have you ever had sex when you really didn't want to?** Health care providers must report suspected sexual abuse of minors to the New York State Central Registry for Child Abuse and Maltreatment: 1-800-635-1522 or **311**. Adult victims of rape should be referred to law enforcement and/or social services as needed. Call the Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE or **311**.
8. **Are you ever frightened for your (or your children's) safety because of the anger of a partner or family member? Have you even been injured by a partner or family member?** If so, help is available. Call the Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-621-HOPE, or **311**.



2 Help prevent STIs. Tell patients the following:

- Most people with STIs are not aware of any symptoms. Left untreated, STIs can have serious complications (e.g. infertility, cancer, AIDS).
- STIs can be avoided by not having sex. If you are having sex, you can reduce your risk of STIs by limiting the number of people you have sex with and using condoms every time. The more partners you have, the higher your risk.
- Recognize that oral sex can spread STIs, including syphilis.
- Use a latex condom (or other type of latex barrier) whenever you have sex—vaginal, anal, or oral. If you are allergic to latex, you can use condoms made of polyurethane or other synthetic materials.
- Before beginning a sexual relationship, you and your partner(s) should be checked for STIs, including HIV.
- If you are infected with an STI, it's important to tell your partners, so they can be tested and treated too.
- If you are treated for an STI, make sure your partner(s) is treated and don't have sex until you and your partners have completed therapy.
- Combine condoms with another type of birth control (such as "the Pill") to prevent pregnancy.
- Alcohol, drug use and depression can increase the risk of unsafe sex. For help, patients can call 1-800-LifeNet or 311.