Sexually Transmitted Infections: What Students Need to Know

According to www.coolnurse.com, there are more than 12 million cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) reported each year in the United States. At least three million of those cases are among the teenage population. In fact, teens report the highest rates of STDs of any age group.

The general term “sexually transmitted disease” (now sometimes called STI for “sexually transmitted infection”) is applied to any of the group of diseases that can be spread from one person to another through intimate sexual contact such as genital foreplay, sexual intercourse, oral-genital contact or anal sex.

STIs can be particularly serious for women because many cause few or no symptoms, making them easy to go unnoticed – and untreated. Women who contract an STI can be at risk for ectopic (tubal) pregnancy, chronic pelvic pain, infertility, and cervical cancer.

STIs must be accurately diagnosed and treated completely. Women who are considering becoming sexually active, or who are sexually active, should have regular gynecological examinations as well.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services’ Centers for Disease Control (CDC), sexually transmitted diseases among men and women include the following: Bacterial Vaginosis (BV), Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Hepatitis (Viral), Herpes (Genital), Human Papillomavirus Infection (HPV), Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID), Syphilis and Trichomoniasis.

How Can My Student Stay Safe?

Remind your student of the following ways to protect him/herself:

- Know what kinds of intimate contact can transmit various STIs.
- The only sure way to avoid transmission of a STI is to abstain from sexual contact.
- The chances of catching an STI are reduced if both partners in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship have been tested and are uninfected.
- Those with multiple sexual partners should use latex barrier protection (correctly) every time they have sex.
- Talk about safe sex practices before engaging in sexual activity.
- Don’t have sex with a partner who refuses to use a condom.

HPV: A Special Concern for Women

Human Papillomavirus Infection (HPV) is found among the college student population nationwide. At least 50% of sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives. 6.2 million people in the US alone contract HPV yearly; it is most commonly found in young women and men in their late teens and early 20s.

About 40 types of HPV can infect the genital areas of men and women. While most types of HPV cause no symptoms and disappear on their own, some types can cause cervical cancer in women.

In 2006, the first vaccine ever developed to prevent cervical cancer and other diseases in females caused by certain types of HPV, became available to the public. According to the CDC, the vaccine, Gardasil®, protects against four types of HPV. These four HPV types are responsible for causing 70% of cervical cancers and 90% of genital warts.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently licensed this vaccine for use in girls/women ages 9-26 years. While the vaccine is recommended for 11-12 year-old girls, it can be given to girls and women between the ages of 9-26. Ideally, the vaccine should be given before students become sexually active. The vaccine is given through a series of three shots over a six-month period.

Currently, the length of the vaccine’s protection is unknown. The vaccine does not treat existing HPV infections, genital warts, precancers, or cancers, nor does it protect against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancers or genital warts.

STIs can impact your student’s health. Conversations that occur now can do a lifetime of good.

Sources: The Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/std/; www.coolnurse.com

HIV/AIDS & STIs

According to the CDC, individuals infected with STIs are at least two to five times more likely than uninfected individuals to acquire HIV, if they are exposed to the virus through sexual contact. Additionally, an individual infected with HIV and another STI is more likely to transmit HIV through sexual contact than other HIV-infected individuals. Many believe this may be because the presence of STIs increases the levels of susceptibility and infectiousness.