

## Lesson 2: An STI's Tale

Educators and health professionals know all too well the epidemic of sexually transmitted infections among adolescents in the United States with one in four sexually active teens becoming infected with an STI each year. Most adults recognize that this is a topic of critical importance for young people. If we want teens to make educated, healthy choices, they must have a comprehensive understanding of both the continuum of risk and possible consequences of a wide variety of sexual behaviors. The challenge is to help young people personalize their risk of contracting an STI and penetrate their belief that “it won’t happen to me”. Developmentally, teens are supposed to feel invincible and it is appropriate for them not to feel personally susceptible. This developmental task leaves educators in a difficult position when crafting health education lessons to help teens assess their risks and learn skills to protect themselves from becoming infected.

Chronicling the life of the herpes virus, this article helps teens understand the reality of a typical herpes infection. Herpes is an infection that, according to the American Social Health Association, infects 50-80% of the adult population orally and 20% of the adult population genitally. Of those with genital herpes, 90% are unaware that they have the virus, so spreading genital herpes often happens without the infected partner being aware that they are contagious. This article is a first step toward helping young people understand how the virus “thinks” and acts in the body. It also helps to explain how herpes is transmitted to another person and how young people can reduce their risk of being infected. (Please Note: It is ideal to pair this activity with the lesson for “Journey to the Condom Rack” to teach students about correct condom use.)

**Learning Objectives:** By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Describe two risk factors for becoming infected with genital herpes
- List three symptoms of genital herpes

**Materials:**

- Copies of “An STI’s Tale”
- Access to research materials—internet, library, textbooks, brochures, etc.
- Markers or chalk
- Flipchart paper or chalkboard

**Procedure**

1. Ask students to brainstorm the different sexually transmitted infections. As they supply the names, write them on the chalkboard or flipchart paper in three different columns as follows. Add any infections that your students are not able to think of so you have the following infections in three columns as follows:

Herpes	Chlamydia	Pubic Lice
HIV/AIDS	Gonorrhea	Scabies
Hepatitis B & C	Syphilis	
HPV-Genital Warts	Bacterial Vaginosis	
	Trichomoniasis	

2. Next, ask students to look at the three columns and try to figure out why you grouped the STIs in the way that you did. The correct answers are what causes each infection and/or whether or not they can be cured. Once this has been suggested, write the following titles over each category:

Virus	Bacteria	Parasite
<u>(Treatment, No Cure)</u>	<u>(Can be cured)</u>	<u>(Can be cured)</u>
Herpes	Chlamydia	Pubic Lice
HIV/AIDS	Gonorrhea	Scabies
Hepatitis B & C	Syphilis	
HPV-Genital Warts	Bacterial Vaginosis	
	Trichomoniasis	

Leave this list on the board for the remainder of the activity.

3. Distribute copies of “An STI’s Tale” and read together with students. Solicit their guesses for which STI it might be. Take a show of hands with each of the guesses so that each student gets to vote on the answer they think is correct. Then read the answer together provided at the end of the article. Use the following questions to discuss herpes:
  - Does what happened to Luke (forgetting to use protection during sex, not using protection during oral sex and being worried about getting tested) seem like a realistic story? Why or why not?
  - What different choices could Luke have made to prevent becoming infected? What could Luke have done differently in order to make those choices?

- What is meant about herpes “shedding” and transmission when there are no visible symptoms?
  - Why do some teens feel that they are not at risk for getting an STI even if they are sexually active?
  - Even though teens might know a lot about STIs, why do some still not protect themselves during sex?
  - The personality of this virus seemed sneaky in the way that it operated. How did this STI manage to hide the infection from Luke?
  - Since most people who have STIs don’t know they have an infection, how can people protect themselves?
  - The virus took pleasure in the knowledge that there might be copies of itself running around in Luke’s two unprotected partners, but how might Luke have felt if he discovered herpes was transmitted? How might his partners feel if they discovered they now had herpes?
  - Where can teens go in this community to get tested and treated for STIs? Where can teens go in this community to get condoms and other latex barriers?
  - What are the best ways to prevent getting an STI?
4. Inform students that the next part of the activity is going to involve them creating their own STI’s Tale. Divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Instruct the group that they are to choose an STI from the list on the board, and do research about it on the internet, at the library or in their textbooks, in order to create their own STI Tale. Check in with the different groups to make sure that at least one infection from each category is chosen. Their task is to create a story about transmission from the perspective of an STI. Explain that the class will try and guess which STI it is at the end. Give groups 20-25 minutes to complete this assignment using websites, textbooks or library resources. (If necessary, give this assignment as homework or allow an additional class period for completion.)
5. Have each group read their STI’s Tale aloud to the class and have other students try and guess which STI the story was about. Ask each group to tell you their primary source(s) of information and write these sources on a master list (flipchart paper) titled STD Resources. Leave this list posted for the remainder of your unit on sexually transmitted infections. Supplement the list by adding any of the following:

#### **Hotlines**

1-800-440-8336—American Red Cross Teen HIV/AIDS Hotline

1-800-227-8922—American Social Health National STI Hotline

1-800-230-PLAN—Planned Parenthood Federation of American clinic locator

#### **Web Sites**

**www.iwannaknow.org**—American Social Health Association teen web site

**www.sexetc.org**—Stories about STDs and HIV/AIDS from *SEX, ETC.*

**www.unspeakable.com**—Pfizer Pharmaceuticals STI web site

**www.teenwire.org**—Planned Parenthood Federation of American teen web site

**www.youthhiv.org**—Advocates for Youth teen web site

6. Close the lesson by reminding teens of the variety of STIs and the different “personalities” they have. Have them consider what each story had in common and what differences they heard in the profiles. Remind the students of choices and behaviors that can eliminate or reduce the risk of being “visited” by an STI.