

Frequently Asked Questions about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) Education and Testing

1. Why use schools to educate and offer testing?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are at epidemic levels across the nation. Up to 80% of those infected with STIs do not have signs or symptoms of their infection. In addition, STIs disproportionately affect adolescents. In order to fight this epidemic, testing needs to be available to all students, and treatment needs to be free and confidential. Schools are the best way to reach young Philadelphians with testing and information concerning disease prevention. Abstinence will be identified as the best method to prevent STIs.

2. Who will do the testing?

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health will provide testing that is free, voluntary and confidential. Health Department staff will provide an educational presentation about STIs and how the program works prior to testing. If you believe your child should be tested immediately for an STI, we urge you to arrange to have your child tested through your private physician or health care provider, or through one of the Health Department's health care centers.

3. Who will be tested?

All high school students will be offered testing on a *voluntary* basis. No physical exam is needed, just a small sample of urine. The urine will be tested for gonorrhea and chlamydia, the two most common diseases among teens. Students who are sexually active are encouraged to be tested. *Students who do not want to be tested will not be required to provide a urine sample.* Specimens will not be tested for drugs.

4. What if the gonorrhea or chlamydia test is positive?

These diseases can be cured with antibiotics. Most students can be treated with a single dose of oral medication. If the students do not re-expose themselves to the STI, they will no longer have the infection. All students who test positive will receive treatment in order to prevent complications of infection and to prevent the spread of STIs. The Health Department will provide free, confidential treatment at a Health Department's health care center. In special circumstances, students can choose to have a prescription ordered to their local pharmacy. Students will be counseled to reduce their risk of reinfection and referred for follow-up if necessary.

5. What happens if the test is not taken or treatment is not administered?

Undetected or untreated STIs can cause serious health problems. These problems include infertility, pelvic inflammatory disease, and tubal pregnancy in women, and painful inflammation in men.

6. How will confidentiality be maintained?

The student will have the ability to select a personal code (password) at the time of testing. Students may obtain their test results by calling a special Health Department number and stating their personal code or by setting up a secured (private) internet account that they can access using their password. The Health Department will work with each school to establish a personalized and confidential protocol for both testing and treatment.

7. Why can this testing and treatment be provided without parental consent?

The Pennsylvania Department of Health's Rules and Regulations regarding STI screening and treatment allows that "a person under 21 years of age may give consent for medical and other health services to determine the presence of or to treat a sexually transmitted infection or condition."



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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September 2025

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Philadelphia continues to face an epidemic of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among its teenagers. To combat this problem, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health and the School District of Philadelphia work together to educate high school students about STIs and offer free, voluntary, and confidential testing and treatment for gonorrhea and chlamydia, two of the most common infectious diseases among teenagers. It is important to diagnose and treat these infections early to prevent long term harm to a teenager's future fertility and to prevent spread.

This collaboration provides an educational presentation about STIs and offers voluntary testing for thousands of students annually. To date, approximately 200,000 tests have been performed and 10,000 infections found, with nearly 100 percent of all infections treated. Presentations, testing, and treatment are offered at no cost to the student, parent, or School District.

During the 2025-2026 school year, this successful program will continue in a *safe and effective* manner. Students in high schools will receive STI prevention education and will be offered the opportunity for free and confidential testing for STIs. If a student's test result is positive, they will receive free antibiotic treatment, given under a health care provider's supervision.

The School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health strongly believe that we have an obligation to do everything we can to ensure children remain healthy and free of STIs. We encourage you to take a few moments to speak with your child/children about sexuality, including the prevention and consequences of STIs. You are your child's first and most important teacher, especially when addressing these issues. If you need additional information about STIs or would like suggestions on speaking with your child about STIs, please visit the Department of Public Health's website www.TakeControlPhilly.org.

Included for your information is a sheet of Frequently Asked Questions about this program. If you have other questions, please call the Health Department's STD Control Program at 215-685-6614.

Sincerely,

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