

A test for life

Written by Staff Report
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SANTA FE – In the Public Health field, there are many things talked about every day about what you can do for your health. Diet and exercise are just the beginning.

Getting yourself tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is one of the most important things you can do to protect your health. Not only is it quick and simple, it's also usually confidential.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a 2014 study found that one-third of adolescents didn't talk about sexual health issues with their doctors at all during annual health visits. That's a problem no matter how young or old we are. It's important to be honest with our doctors about your sexual history so that he or she can provide us with the appropriate STD testing and prevention guidance.

We're wrapping up National STD Awareness Month in New Mexico, where the New Mexico Department of Health and other organizations have worked to get out a message that is also shared year-round.

Earlier this month, I visited the New Mexico State University campus, where Department of Health employees were on hand at the university's Health Center for GYT: Get Yourself Tested Day. There hundreds of college students took advantage of the no cost STD testing. That's a great thing because research shows half of all sexually active young people in the United States will get an STD by the time they're 25—and most won't know it.

In addition to community outreach, the New Mexico Department of Health's Public Health Offices are among the many places residents young and old can go to get tested and learn their status.

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Some of the most common STDs are chlamydia, herpes and gonorrhea. Around 3 million new cases of chlamydia are reported each year, with adolescent women being the most commonly affected. While chlamydia can be treated with the use of antibiotics, STDs like HIV/AIDS are for life and will require continual treatment.

False assumptions about STDs—how they're spread, treated, and prevented—are everywhere and it can be especially hard for people to get the facts. You can't tell someone has an STD just by looking at them, but unless you ask, STD tests aren't always a part of a regular doctor visit either.

According to the CDC and New Mexico Department of Health, Not having sex is the only way to prevent STDs. If you are sexually active, however, you can lower your risk of getting STDs by:

- Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and does not have STDs.
- Limiting the number of people you have sex with if you have more than one partner.
- Using latex condoms and dental dams the right way every time you have sex.
- Getting an HPV vaccine, which can protect you against diseases (including cancers) caused by the human papillomavirus.

For more information about STD health services available statewide include free counseling, testing and referral services at Public Health Offices and community organizations visit the NM HIV Hepatitis STD Online Resource Guide. There is a mobile version of the site at m.nmhivguide.org.