

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY HEALTH?

There are lots of things you can do to protect your sexual health and future fertility.

Condoms and Dental Dams

Condoms do double duty. They can help prevent both STIs and pregnancy. But only if you use them! You can choose either internal (female) or external (male) condoms. For oral sex, dental dams can also be used.

PrEP

PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) involves taking a single pill each day and is over 90% effective at preventing HIV infection. PrEP is recommended for anyone who is HIV-negative but has a partner who is HIV-positive, or anyone who may have a higher risk for HIV. A provider can help you figure out if PrEP is a good choice for you.

Get Tested

The only way to know if you have an STI is to get tested. If you've had unprotected sex, have a new partner (or more than one partner), or for any reason are worried you have been exposed to an STI, head to a military treatment center or local clinic and talk to a provider about STI testing.

Contraception

Unintended pregnancy is a challenge for any woman, but for women in the military, it can sideline your career. There are highly effective contraceptive options that provide years of pregnancy protection and require nothing on your part, like implants and IUDs, as well as other options.

SEX, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND YOU

For more information, visit
www.ashasexualhealth.org/military



What you need to know to **protect your health and fertility** and reduce your risk for sexually transmitted infections.

Sex is great. Sex also comes with some risk, as do many good things in life. If you choose to be sexually active, there are ways you can manage this risk and take care of your sexual health.

UNDERSTANDING STIs

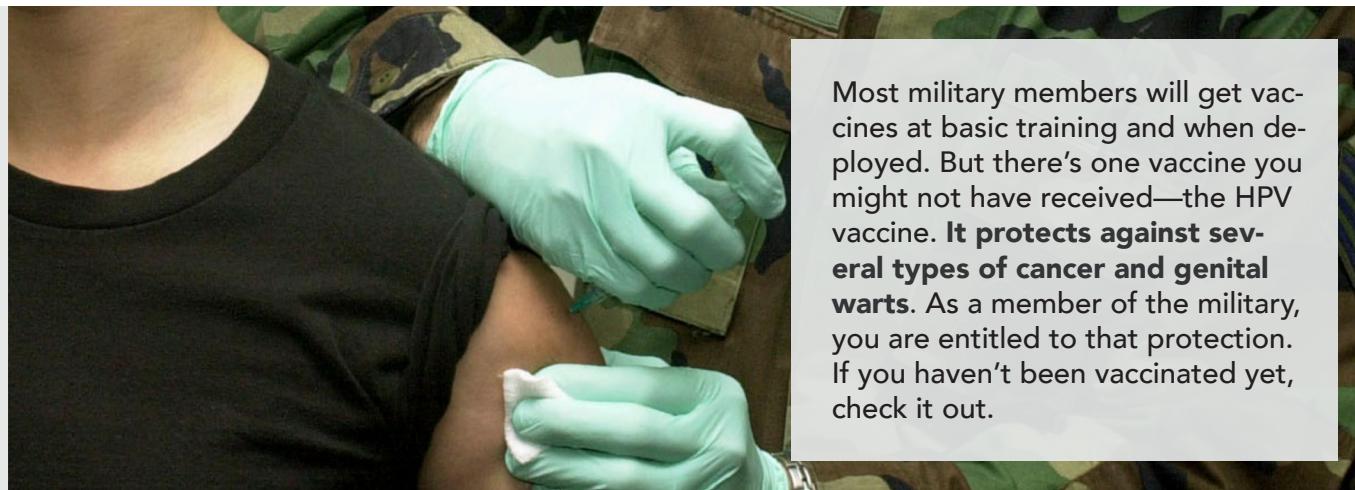
As the name suggests, sexually transmitted infections (or STIs) are passed on through sex—and that includes vaginal, oral and anal sex. Some STIs can be also be passed on through skin-to-skin contact.

While anyone who is sexually active can get an STI, they are especially common in young people—both in the service and out. In fact, **1 in 2 sexually active people will get an STI by age 25**. But many of them won't know it, because many times a person will have no symptoms at all.

But no symptoms doesn't mean no problems. **When STIs are left undiagnosed and untreated, they can cause health complications**, including infertility (the inability to have children) and even cancer.

This is why it's so important to be proactive when it comes to your sexual health:

- **Get screened for STIs** as recommended—and take your sexual partner(s) with you to get tested too.
- **Take advantage of treatment and counseling services** at military treatment facilities.
- **Know your body—and your boundaries**—and make sure you communicate well with your partner(s).



Most military members will get vaccines at basic training and when deployed. But there's one vaccine you might not have received—the HPV vaccine. **It protects against several types of cancer and genital warts.** As a member of the military, you are entitled to that protection. If you haven't been vaccinated yet, check it out.

WHAT TESTS SHOULD I GET?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends specific STI screening tests for sexually active people:

Everyone age 13-64

should get an HIV test at least once. Your provider may recommend testing more often.

Women younger than 25

should be tested every year for chlamydia and gonorrhea, common infections that can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease if untreated.

Pregnant women

should be tested for syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis B starting early in pregnancy. At-risk pregnant women should also be tested for chlamydia and gonorrhea starting early in pregnancy.

Gay and bisexual men

should be tested at least once a year for syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhea, and may benefit from more frequent HIV testing.

Beyond these recommendations, though, your provider may suggest additional tests based on your sexual history.

WHAT IF I'VE HAD UNPROTECTED SEX?

Maybe you got caught up in the moment and forgot to use a condom, or your diaphragm. Perhaps you missed a couple birth control pills recently. Or maybe you were coerced into unsafe sex. **What are your next steps?**

If you're concerned about HIV

you can talk to a provider about PEP, post-exposure prophylaxis. It involves taking medicine as soon as possible, but no more than 72 hours (3 days), after you may have been exposed to HIV to try to reduce the chance of becoming HIV-positive.

If you're concerned about pregnancy

you can take emergency contraception (EC) to help prevent pregnancy. EC pills, some of which are available over the counter, should be taken within five days of unprotected sex—the sooner the better.

If you're concerned about STIs

get tested. But talk to a provider about when you should be tested. Some STIs can't be detected by testing right away, so you may need to wait a week to up to three months for some tests.