

Frequently Asked Questions about Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Testing

1. Why test in the schools?

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are at epidemic levels across the nation. Up to 80% of those infected with STDs do not have signs or symptoms of their infection. In addition, STDs 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 STDs.

2. Who will do the testing?

The Philadelphia Department of Public Health in cooperation with the School District of Philadelphia will provide testing that is free, voluntary and confidential. Health Department staff will provide an educational presentation about STDs and how the program works prior to testing. If you believe your child should be tested immediately for an STD, 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 a urine test 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 STD, 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 STDs. The Health Department will provide free, confidential treatment in the school about one week after testing. 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 STDs 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 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 STD 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 disease, infection or condition."