How do I know if I need an STD test?

It all comes down to this: You need an STD test if you have ever had sex. Don’t assume that you’re receiving STD testing every time you have a gynecologic exam or Pap test. If you need STD testing, request it from your doctor. Talk to your doctor about your concerns and what tests you’d like or need.

Will the clinic tell my parents?

No. Most clinics are completely confidential. Washington State law says that you can access sexual healthcare on your own starting at age 14. That means your parents don’t need to give permission for you to be there, and they won’t be contacted by the clinic about your appointment as long as you are 14 or older. The clinic cannot give out any information unless you ask them to do so.

To make you feel even more comfortable, when you call to make an appointment, ask them about their confidentiality policy. You can ask:

- Will you call me at home?
- Will you send me a bill?
- Will you send any other mail?

Since each clinic works a little differently, this is the best way to know for sure.

A simple way to stay healthy

Sea Mar CHC - Medical Clinic
2121 South 19th Street
Tacoma, WA 98405
(253) 593-2144

Planned Parenthood
1515 Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Tacoma, WA 98405
(800) 769-0045
702 30th Avenue Southwest
Puyallup, WA 98373
(800) 769-0045

Cedar River Clinic
1401-A Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Tacoma, WA 98405
(253) 473-6031

Community Health Care
Locations throughout Pierce County
www.commhealth.org

If you’re still uncertain where to go or how to make an appointment, call the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department STD/HIV Information Line, (253) 798-3805, to get some help.

Reprinted with permission from Sex, Etc., the national magazine and website (sexetc.org) written by teens, for teens, on sexual health issues, published by Answer at Rutgers University.

Call. Ask. Arrive.
How do I make an appointment?

Making an appointment at a clinic helps ensure that the provider will have enough time to see you on the day that best fits your schedule. Having an appointment also reduces waiting time. Here’s what you need to do...

Call
A clinic, like one of those listed on the back page

Ask
Can I make an appointment to get checked for STDs?
- Let them know if you are experiencing symptoms (discharge, burning when you pee, sores, abdominal pain)
- Have dates and times ready when the receptionist asks when you want an appointment (I’m available after school on...)

Arrive
Show up a little early for your appointment because you might have some paperwork to fill out.

What happens at the appointment?

Be prepared to share personal information with the health care provider about the types of sex you had (oral, anal, vaginal), the number of partners you had, and when the last time was that you were sexual with someone. Don’t worry; this is all confidential. They’re not there to judge you, so it’s important for you to be honest in order to ensure the best care for you.

Keep in mind, sometimes it takes up to two weeks for your test results to come back. While you’re waiting, be extra sure to use protection (like condoms) or just don’t have sex.

What if I test positive for an STD? What happens next?

Some STDs are curable with antibiotics, which means it will completely go away, while others are treatable, which means you can treat the symptoms but you will always have the STD itself.

If you test positive for an STD then you will either be given a prescription for medication that will cure the STD, or medication that will treat the symptoms of the STD.

It’s very important for all of your sexual partners to get the same treatment as you; ask your doctor’s office about how to make it happen.

What is the STD test like?

Well, first of all, there is no ONE test for all STDs.

Some STDs can be detected in your blood (HIV, Syphilis). Some can be detected in your urine (Gonorrhea, Chlamydia). Others are detected by taking cultures, which usually means having a clinician take a fluid sample from your mouth, vagina or anus with a cotton swab (Herpes). Sometimes the providers will also examine your genital area. No one test can test for all STDs.

How much will it cost?

The cost really depends on the test and where you go to get tested. Many clinics offer low-cost or even free testing to teens. Just ask about that when you call to make your appointment.