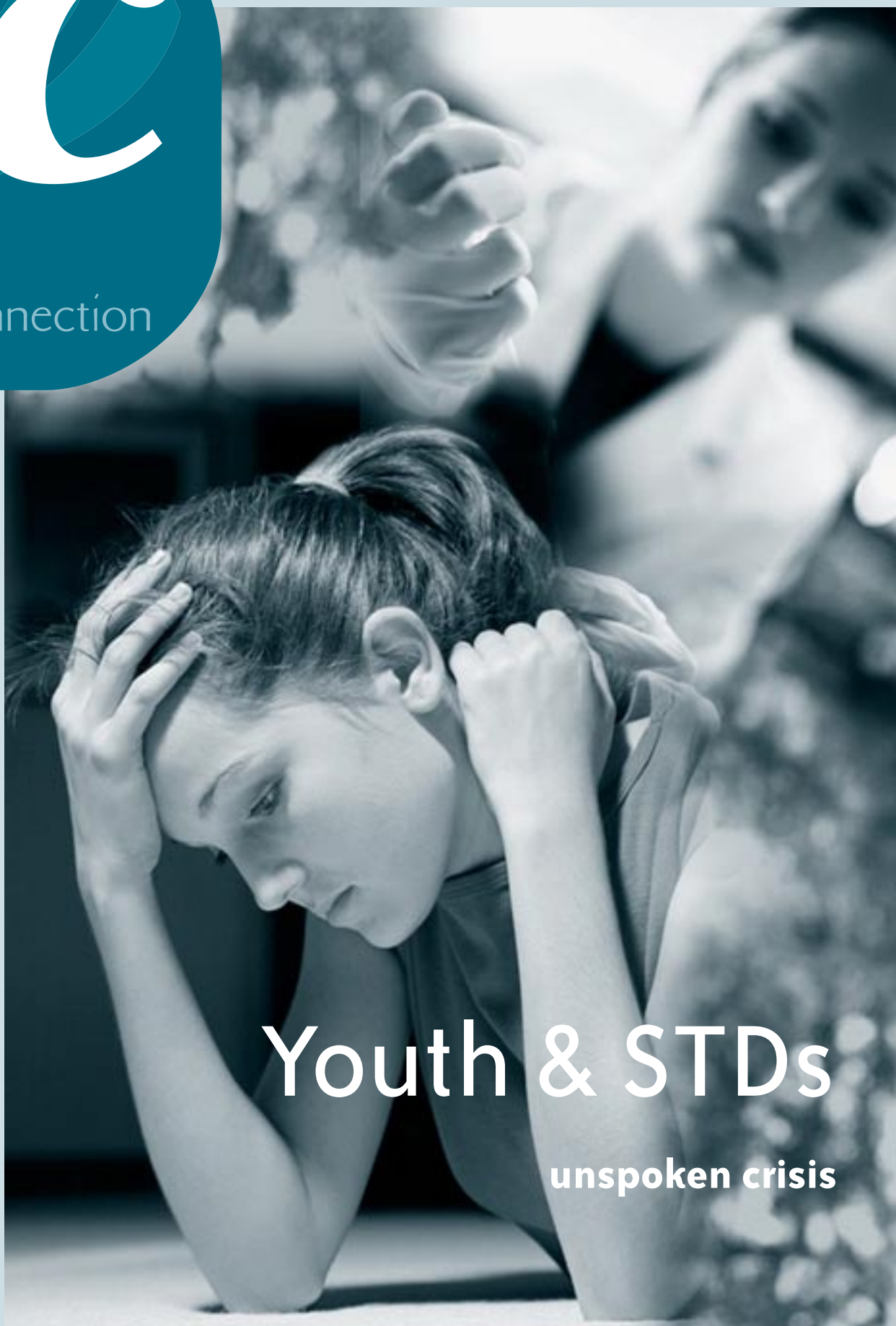




A bi-monthly publication of the Institute for Youth Development



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# Youth & STDs

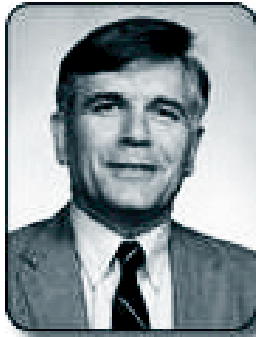
**unspoken crisis**

march/april 2004

# Our View



**W**hen most people think about teens and sex, the potential for an unwanted pregnancy comes to mind.



Today, the issue has become much more complicated. With the recent and unprecedented surge in sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), more than ever before sex has become another avenue to a wider range of life-altering complications.

Recent statistics indicate that during the past year alone up to 3-4 million teens have become infected with some form of STD.

Today, STDs run a wicked continuum; somewhere between 25 and 50 have been identified. As viruses mutate even more are sure to find their way into our teenage population.

Herpes, gonorrhea and syphilis have been joined by more than 100 strains of human papilloma virus (HPV) - a particularly troublesome virus that is directly linked to 99.7% of all cervical cancer. Cervical cancer kills more women in the U.S. today than HIV/AIDS.

Approximately 20% of our population over the age of 12 has the herpes type 2 virus. As you'll see in this issue of The Youth Connection, the list goes on and on.

Unfortunately, many teens have been led to believe that condoms are a way to avoid unwanted pregnancies and preserve sexual health. Far too many are finding that this is simply not true.

For starters, even when condoms are properly used 100% of the time, condoms can still fail. What's more, they do not protect against many STDs that only require skin-to-skin contact for infection to occur.

And then, there's the issue of oral sex. One out of every five teens reports that they consider it safe sex. This couldn't be further from the truth. HIV, herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis and hepatitis B can be contracted orally.

It's time to tell our kids the simple truth. Teens should not initiate sex, but appreciate its value later in their lives. They have more important things to do with their lives than complicate matters with premature participation in sexual relationships. It's dangerous, psychologically damaging, the consequences often irreversible, and can place a totally avoidable roadblock in the middle of their lives at a time when they should be building for the future.

Arm them with the information they need to make informed, responsible decisions. Explain how wonderful sex can be in the appropriate setting such as marriage. Encourage them to invest in themselves by having the courage to "just say no" today to alcohol, drugs, tobacco, violence - and, just as importantly, to sex.

Shepherd Smith  
President, Institute for Youth Development

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**T**wenty five years ago, who would have thought that teenage sex could have life-threatening consequences? Not that an unwanted pregnancy or an STD such as gonorrhea or syphilis that was prevalent then isn't a tremendous challenge to a teenager's life, but the stakes are now much higher.

In some ways, we are experiencing a silent invasion. There are no huge headlines on magazine covers and no public service initiatives to highlight the increasingly serious threat facing our teens.

For many of us, this has occurred because of two false perceptions. The first is that there are a limited number of STDs out there, and that apart from HIV/AIDS few, if any, are life-threatening. The second is that as long as we practice "safe sex" we are indeed safe.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

infections. That's nearly 25% of the U.S. population, and the number continues to grow.

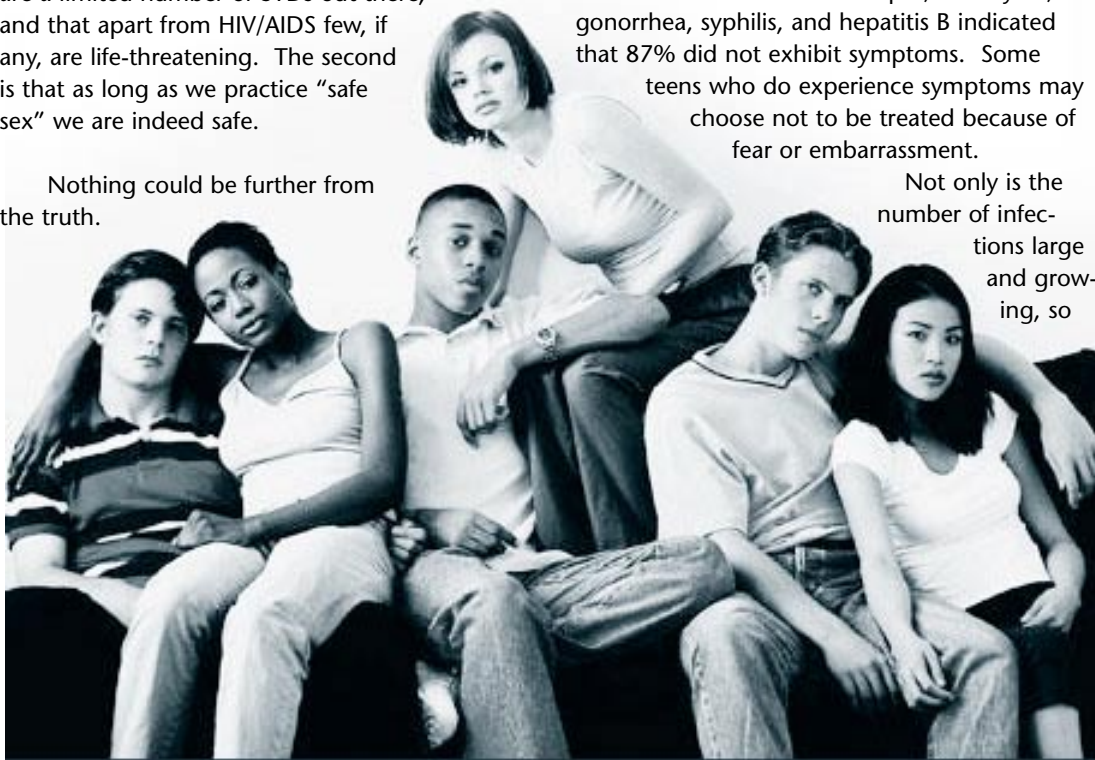
The numbers seem to be increasing. During the year 2000, approximately 18.9 million new cases of STD occurred with young people aged 15-24 accounting for 9.1 million cases.

Interestingly enough, these numbers may be conservative because not all teens experience symptoms and therefore are not diagnosed and counted.

Some researchers believe that as many as 80% of teens with STDs never seek medical attention because they do not notice or recognize symptoms. A study of teen girls who had one or more infections of herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and hepatitis B indicated that 87% did not exhibit symptoms. Some teens who do experience symptoms may choose not to be treated because of fear or embarrassment.

Not only is the number of infections large and growing, so

... we are  
experiencing  
a silent  
invasion.



# STDS A Teenage Epidemic?

## The Numbers Speak for Themselves

The numbers associated with this epidemic are simply staggering. In June, 2000, the National Institutes of Health's Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases reported that more than 65 million people in the U.S. are living with an STD — the majority of which are incurable viral

are the types of STDs.

For starters, STD is short-hand for somewhere between 25 and 50 different types of sexually-transmitted diseases. Diseases that are caused by sexually-transmitted infections range from irritating but treatable to life threatening

In addition to the more well-known STDs such as syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, and gonorrhea, there are new viral strains that are not

# STDs

continued

The numbers associated with [the STD] epidemic are simply staggering.

Many teens have a misguided sense of safety. They have been led to believe they can practice "safe sex" by using condoms and participating in oral sex.

talked about in the mainstream press and are, therefore, not well known. Overall, viruses are particularly troublesome because they are incurable. Once you've contracted a virus, it's up to the immune system to suppress it or allow it to grow. Viruses are spreading like wildfire.

The human papilloma virus (HPV) is a potentially deadly disease that is incurable. There are more than 100 different strains in existence today. HPV is directly linked to 99.7% of all cervical cancer. HPV-related cancer kills more women in the U.S. today than HIV/AIDS.

In 2000, HPV infection accounted for approximately 6.2 million of all sexually-transmitted diseases among Americans aged 15-44. It is estimated that 74% occurred among 15-24 year-olds. It also accounts for 45% of the total medical cost for all STDs in the U.S. The total annual STD cost in the U.S. is estimated to be \$6.5 billion.

A variety of studies have shown that after their first sexual contact, girls have a 46% chance of contracting HPV. A recent study revealed that 50% of sexually-active females between 18 and 22 have HPV. Gynecologists throughout the country are reporting that they are seeing an alarming number of pre-cancerous conditions among girls who are in their teens and early 20s.

Equally alarming is that approximately 20% of our population over the age of 12 has the herpes type 2 virus. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention believe the number could be as large as 45 million+ people. There has been a 500% increase in herpes type 2 in white teens since 1976. It is estimated that teens aged 15-24 acquire 640,000 new herpes type 2 infections each year. Herpes type 2 causes genital infections, but it can also infect the mouth. Symptoms can be treated, but like HPV, it is an incurable virus that retreats into the nerve cells and then randomly recurs - sometimes with great frequency.

Herpes type 2 is very contagious. While most people become infected when the other partner is having an outbreak, it is believed that the virus can shed cells in between outbreaks, thereby causing infections when no symptoms are present.

Overall, herpes can be a very painful, disruptive, and psychologically damaging disease for teens, their future mates and their unborn children. In addition to uncomfortable outbreaks, a female who has a first episode of herpes type 2 while pregnant can pass it along to her baby. This can cause premature births, nerve damage, and other serious problems that affect the brain, skin and eyes of the child.

And then, there's HIV/AIDS. While most people are familiar with this disease, it is not



widely known that a person can be infected and contagious before a blood test detects the antibodies that are present as a result of the virus. This should be a very sobering fact for teens and adults alike as they make decisions about whether they should engage in sexual relationships.

## What is Driving This Epidemic?

So, why is this happening to our youth? What has changed during the past 25 years that has resulted in an overwhelming public health problem for young people?

For starters, young adults are more likely than other age groups to have multiple sex partners, and for young women, to choose sexual partners older than themselves. Research has shown that older sex partners pose a greater risk for teen HIV infection, in particular, because they are more likely to have had multiple partners and a wider variety of sexual and drug experiences.

Young women are biologically more susceptible to chlamydia, gonorrhea, HPV and HIV because their biological system presents more fertile ground for these infections than adult females. As a result, teenage girls are likely to suffer more long-term consequences.

A parent cannot underestimate the fact that teens will increase the number of partners they have when they have sex at earlier ages. Studies indicate that the earlier they begin, the more likely they are to have an increasing number of partners. More partners means increased exposure to infection.

More importantly, many teens have a misguided sense of safety. They have been led to believe they can practice "safe sex" by using condoms and participating in oral sex.

The numbers prove it. Nearly 1 out of 5 teens report that oral sex is safe. In addition, teens have been led to believe that condoms provide safe sex. Many are unaware of the fact that condoms do not effectively reduce their exposure to many STDs. In some cases, they offer no protection at all.

HPV and herpes, for example, can be transmitted in a variety of ways including skin-to-skin contact. Even if a condom is used, infections like these can be transmitted by areas not covered or protected by the condom. In addition some viruses, including herpes can be transmitted orally. Recent studies indicate that oral herpes now causes 75% of genital herpes vs. 25% in previous years.

Moreover, there is little reason to believe that a sexually active teen would use a condom 100% of the time. Of the teens who report using condoms, approximately 25% report that alcohol or drug use seriously affects their ability to use them correctly. In addition, condoms slip or break 1.6% to 3.6% of the time even when consistently used.

The bottom line is that there's no such thing as safe sex. Even the National Institutes of Health report on condom effectiveness, that was issued in July 2001, highlighted the fact that condoms do not offer high levels of protection against all STDs. It is unfortunate that this report received relatively little attention when it was issued, because it helps parents and youth development professionals realize a better understanding of the STD epidemic and its impact on public health.

## What a Parent Can Do

First, arm yourselves and your children with the facts. Informed decisions will help them make healthier choices. Remind them that antibiotics don't work on everything anymore. Once they contract a virus, they're stuck with it

for life.

Understand what's being taught in the schools. Exactly what are your children hearing in the classroom? Are they getting up-to-date information about infection and prevention? Is sexual abstinence offered as a reliable alternative to other methods of birth control and as a 100% effective means to prevent STD infection? Do they understand that even if they find a reliable method of birth control, their new-found sexual freedom becomes a potential gateway to a wide range of diseases and emotional distresses that can turn their lives upside down?

Then, tell your kids to abstain from sex. They want you to do so. Studies consistently show that the majority of teens want to hear these messages from their schools, their religious communities, and most importantly, from their parents. Also explain that sex in itself is not a negative activity. It will become a positive experience with the right person, at the right time, in the right setting such as marriage.

A wide range of studies report that teens rely on their parents' guidance and support more than that of friends, teachers, siblings, girlfriends or boyfriends when they face important decisions or problems. Eight in ten young people report they rely on their parents, while 63% say they rely on parents a lot.

It is important  
for parents to  
"weigh in" on  
the issue of  
sex.



Research has also uncovered that many teens have a predilection for sexual abstinence messages. The majority of teens interviewed in a study funded by the Kaiser Foundation in 2000, for example, indicated that being a virgin is acceptable and even admired among teens.

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## CCF Year 2 Grant Educational Conferences Hosted by The Institute for Youth Development

Under a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services designed to help faith-based and community organizations build capacity and effectively apply for federal funding, the Institute for Youth Development (IYD) is hosting a series of educational conferences. The grant is the result of the historic Faith-Based and Community Initiative created by President Bush.

A nationwide educational conference series was held in 2003, and is continuing into 2004. These conferences are designed to teach faith-based and community organizations

how to win federal grants. The remaining 2004 conferences are listed below.

In addition to the conferences, IYD will also issue sub-awards that range between \$5,000 and \$50,000 and total approximately \$1.6 million during 2004. These grants will be awarded in response to three RFPs (Request for Proposal) issued by IYD during 2004. Organizations that support the programs listed below, have capacity-building needs, and have never received federal funding can compete for these sub-awards by submitting proposals in response to the RFPs.

- Education Program Initiation/Expansion: Employment, Health & Life Skills
- Pregnancy Resource Center Service Delivery & Medical Model
- Youth Development, Healthy Marriages and Families, and HIV Prevention

IYD, the largest grantee under the President's Compassion Capital Fund Program, will award similar funding in 2005.

Information on conference registration and the RFP process can be found at [www.youthdevelopment.org](http://www.youthdevelopment.org).

### 2004 SCHEDULE

<i>May 13-14</i>	<i>Indianapolis, IN</i>
<i>May 20-21</i>	<i>Omaha, NE</i>
<i>June 3-4</i>	<i>Des Moines, IA</i>
<i>June 17-18</i>	<i>Boise, ID</i>
<i>July 8-9</i>	<i>Lansing, MI</i>
<i>July 22-23</i>	<i>Harrisburg, PA</i>
<i>August 5-6</i>	<i>Helena, MT</i>
<i>September 9-10</i>	<i>Portland, ME</i>
<i>September 23-24</i>	<i>Albany, NY</i>



## Teen Marijuana Use Down 11%

The 2003 Monitoring the Future Study released in December 2003 reports that marijuana use has declined among teens. Between 2001 and 2003, marijuana use among 8th, 10th and 12th graders declined 11% from 16.6% in 2001 to 14.8% in 2002. During this period, the Office of National Drug Control Policy's National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign ran to educate the public about the threats associated with teen marijuana use and emphasize the important role parents must play in drug prevention.

## Teens Want Parental Advice on Sex

A study by the Washington, DC-based National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy issued in December 2003 indicates that parents are the biggest influence on a teen's decision to have sex. Forty-five percent of the 1,000 teenagers who were polled said parents represent the biggest influence on this topic.

# STDs

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## Risky Oral Sex May Be Fueling Rise in STDs

A study recently published in the Journal of Pediatric Psychology shows that sexually-active teens have more oral sex partners than other types of sex partners. Twenty-three percent of the 212 tenth graders surveyed said they had three to four oral sex partners in the past year vs. 13% who participated in sexual intercourse.

The study also reported that 40% of the teens surveyed said they had engaged in oral sex without barrier protection within the past year.

Although the risk of getting an STD through oral sex is believed to be lower than through intercourse, it is possible to become infected with dangerous bacterial and viral infections.

Three-quarters of these teens considered it a good thing to make a conscious decision not to have sex until some later time.

Nearly 94% of teens responding to a study conducted in 2000 by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy said it was very important to get strong messages that they abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school. In addition, whether sexually experienced or not, most teens say they are extremely worried about pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other STDs. In fact, HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest sexual health concerns facing teens.

It is important for parents to “weigh in” on the issue of sex. Use this knowledge to communicate with your kids and support them as they make decisions about their sexuality. Your ability to help them avoid sex at early ages, especially throughout their teenage years, increases their chances of remaining healthy by protecting them from the physical as well as the emotional side effects of these diseases.

As a result, they will have many more choices available to them as they make their way toward adulthood—a result that is worth its weight in gold. •

## resource publications

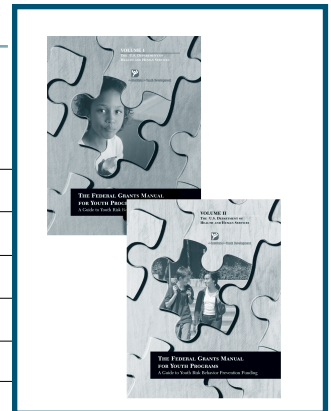
### PUBLICATIONS FOR PARENTS & PROFESSIONALS

Reports published by the Institute for Youth Development analyze the complexities of youth and the key drivers behind the decisions they make about their lives:

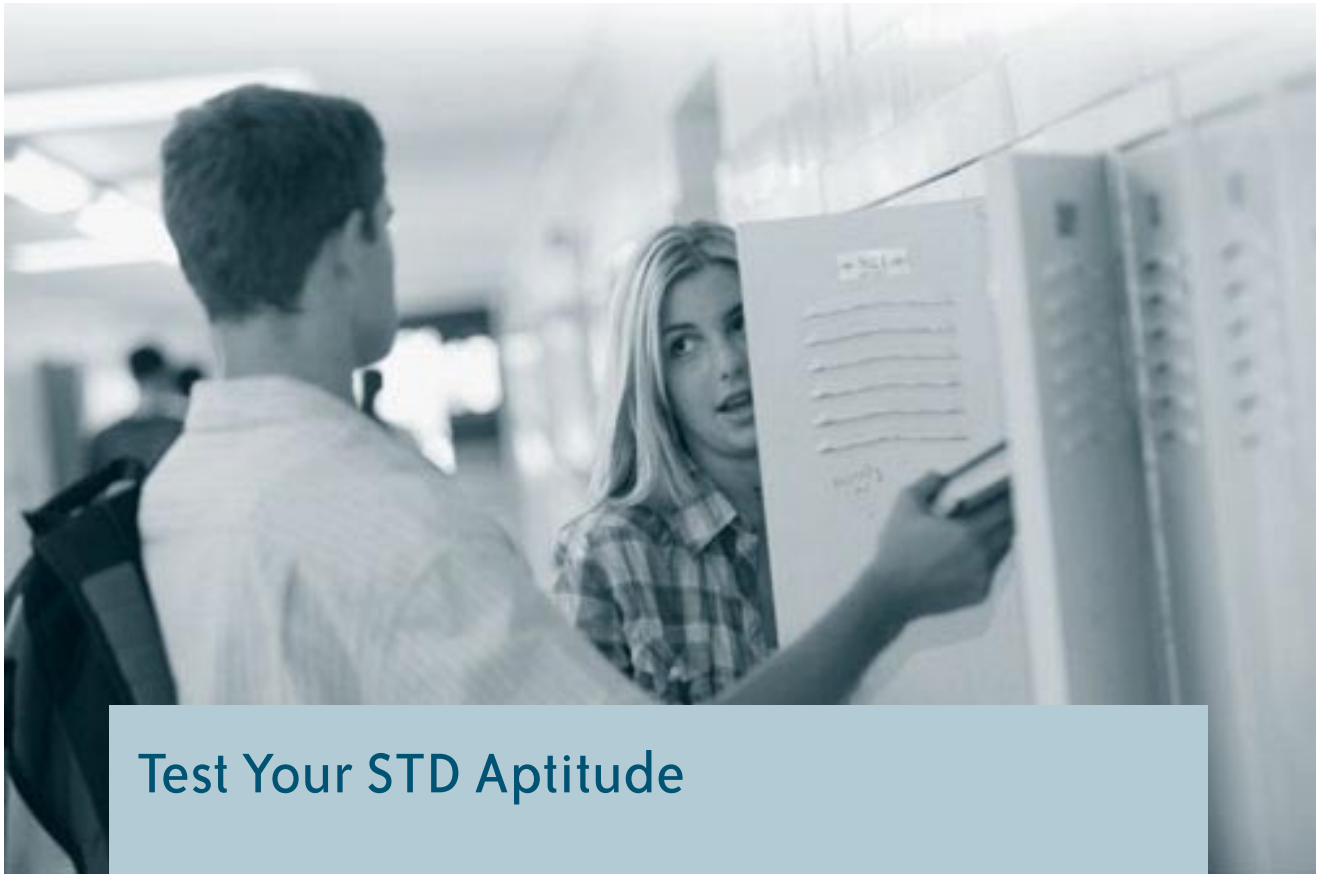
- America's Youth: Measuring the Risk, 4th Edition . . . . . \$20
- Adolescent & Family Health Journal . . . . . \$55/yr.
- Federal Grants Manuals I & II . . . . . \$120
- Protecting Adolescents from Risk: Transcript of Capitol Hill Briefing on New Findings from Add Health . . . . . \$15
- Youth Facts: Youth Substance Abuse & Violence . . . . . FREE
- 10 Tips for Parents: Protecting Your Child From Harm . . . . . FREE

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## Test Your STD Aptitude

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>1</b> STDs increase the chance of getting HIV/AIDS. <b>T F</b></p> <p><b>2</b> A virus-based STD is curable. <b>T F</b></p> <p><b>3</b> You cannot catch an STD by having oral sex. <b>T F</b></p> <p><b>4</b> If you have an STD, you will always know because you'll have symptoms. <b>T F</b></p> <p><b>5</b> Condoms can protect you from just about every type of STD. <b>T F</b></p> | <p><b>6</b> Antibiotics cannot cure STDs that are caused by viruses. <b>T F</b></p> <p><b>7</b> Even when condoms are used 100% of the time, partners can still infect others if they have an STD. <b>T F</b></p> <p><b>8</b> The HIV virus can often go undetected when tests that reveal its presence are given to a recently-infected person. <b>T F</b></p> |
|--|---|
- (1) T; (2) F; (3) F; (4) F; (5) F; (6) T; (7) T; (8) T.