

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

One in Four American Teenage Girls Has Sexually-Transmitted Infection, 04/14/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/health/jan-june08/sti_5-22.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. What is a virus?

2. What is a sexually transmitted disease?

3. What percentage of the girls your age do you think have a sexually transmitted infection?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

1. How many girls ages 14-19 have sexually transmitted infections, according to the CDC study?

ANSWER

A recent study of girls ages 14-19 showed that a large number had one of the four most commonly transmitted infections: chlamydia, trichomoniasis, genital herpes, and HPV—human papillomavirus.

The results indicated that 26 percent of all teenage girls tested positive for at least one of the four sexually transmitted infections (STIs), while 40 percent of sexually active teen girls had at least one STI.

These percentages estimate that 3.2 million teenage girls in the country are currently afflicted with one or more of the most common STIs. Nearly half of all 14-19 year old girls said they were sexually active.

2. Why are the consequences of getting an infection worse for girls than boys?

ANSWER

Teenage boys were not included in the study because methods have only recently become available to test young men for the same infections, said Dr. Forhan. "It would be nice to have information on all adolescents, not just young women, she said. "[But] The potential consequences of these sexually transmitted infections are greater for women than for men, including cervical cancer and infertility."

The most commonly diagnosed infection was HPV, a virus which can cause cervical cancer in women, followed by chlamydia, a bacteria which can cause pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility. Trichomoniasis and genital herpes, though less common in the results, both increase susceptibility to HIV.

3. How can you tell if you have an infection?

ANSWER

"These numbers do not surprise me," said Dr. Margaret Blythe, an adolescent medicine specialist at Indiana University School of Medicine. She notes that many teenagers mistakenly believe they are uninfected because some infections do not present noticeable symptoms. "These infections are asymptomatic—unless you get tested for the common ones you won't know whether you have it or not," she said.

4. What advice do the doctors have for all teens?

ANSWER

Today, it is increasingly important for all teens, Dr. Blythe says, to take charge of their own sexual health.

"Many minors do not know they have the right to be screened, i.e. tested and treated for an STI, in every state in this country, without parental consent," she said, noting that in some states teens as young as 12 can be confidentially examined, and that teens 14 and older do not require consent in any state.

Some insurance plans, however, require co-payments or insurance information that may alert parents that a screening exam has occurred, even though the results are not released.

Accordingly, Dr. Lesley Breech and Dr. Jill Huppert, specialists in pediatric and adolescent gynecology at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, recommend that teens, parents and doctors maintain an open dialogue about sex whenever possible to avoid the stigma and fear of getting tested.

"[This study is] a great opportunity to open the conversation to everyone," Dr. Breech said. "It's given me as a provider some opportunity to bring the [sexual health] conversation into interactions where it would have been uncomfortable and maybe even threatening to some families."

5. What can be done to prevent infection?

ANSWER

Testing and treatment for the infections analyzed in the study have advanced significantly in recent years. Chlamydia diagnoses can now be made without internal examination by testing urine samples, while herpes can be diagnosed with blood tests. A recent HPV vaccine, now widely recommended for young women, prevents two types of HPV that cause 70 percent of cervical cancer and almost all genital warts, Dr. Forhan notes.

"Most of these infections are simply infections and if treated in a timely fashion, if possible, then long term [effects] can be avoided," Dr. Forhan said. "We're trying to avoid the long-term consequences and that's our ultimate, ultimate goal."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What information in this story did you already know? What was new?

2. Why do you think teenagers are reluctant to get tested for sexually-transmitted infections? Is there a stigma? Are teens' lives too busy? What are the barriers to getting tested?

3. Did this article raise any questions about your own health or that of your peers? What steps can you take to answer your questions?

4. What local resources are available to help teens who want to get tested or counseling?

5. Is there anything your class can do to raise awareness of testing and treatment options?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.