

I NOT D

(and you only have to pee)

THE TRUTH ABOUT STIS

Elizabeth Sheehan
ENGLISH/TEACHER LICENSURE MAJOR

Dirty, sick, gross, nasty – words to describe the experience of stepping in dog poop? Wrong. Students tend to use these words to describe sexually transmitted infections that affect 25% of college students and 50% of the general population. Why are we so grossed out by STIs, but not by runny noses or strep throat? What can we do to lessen the negative stigma around STIs and eliminate these attitudes and beliefs? If you follow these simple steps, we'll be well on our way to creating a culture where STIs are viewed in a more realistic way.

I, NOT D

Are you more familiar with the term sexually transmitted *disease*? No worries, STD is the most prevalent term used to describe infections like HIV/AIDS, herpes, genital warts, HPV, gonorrhea and chlamydia. Diseases are often synonymous with lengthy treatment and dire consequences for your body, so using that word can seem a little daunting. Infections, however, have a less severe connotation. Keep in mind that *all* STIs are curable or treatable and will *not* end your sex life.

YOU ONLY HAVE TO PEE

Have you heard horror stories about penile swabs or painful pap tests in order to get tested? Cringe no more at the thought of getting tested! For the most commonly occurring infections in college students, gonorrhea and chlamydia, you only have to supply a urine sample. HIV is also a fairly easy test to take; it only requires an oral swab and you'll get results within the hour. One student recalled getting blood work done at LabCorp for STI testing. While blood work will provide an accurate diagnosis of the infection, testing doesn't have to be elaborate or painful.

Alamance Cares provides free walk-in HIV testing every Tuesday from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. at their office *and* free HIV and syphilis testing on the 2nd and 3rd Thursday of the month at the Ellington Health Center from 3-5 p.m. The Ellington Health Center does provide STI testing for a fee, but you can also be tested for gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, pelvic inflammatory disease, trichomonas, monilia infections, herpes, pubic lice, venereal warts and HIV at the STD clinic of the Alamance County Health Department for free.

TALK TO YOUR PARTNERS, PEOPLE

Are you engaging in sexual activity? If so, you are agreeing to an action that carries a level of risk. To lower your risk and engage in safer sex, talk to your partner or partners about what precautions you both can take to have a more pleasurable experience.

If you're in need of safer sex supplies and you or your partner have run out, you can grab male condoms, female condoms, dental dams and lubricant from the Ellington Health Center or the SPARKS Peer Educators office, as well as from the anonymous request form found on the SPARKS website.

SUPPORT, SUPPORT, SUPPORT

It's easy to feel embarrassed or ashamed about getting tested, so if you know someone who may be interested in finding out more about their sexual health, offer support! It can be as easy as making the appointment for them, or getting tested at the same time. Remember that STIs are common and every infection is curable or treatable. Make it a priority to provide whatever support a person needs in a safe and non-judgmental environment.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

This has been a brief overview of just a few STIs and testing resources, but I challenge you to learn more. Look into testing centers in and around your hometown, consult with your doctor about ways to protect yourself, and speak with partners about the risks involved in sexual activity. Communication is crucial in reducing the use of words like "dirty" and "gross" to describe sexually transmitted infections. Go out, and spread the word.