

A Guide to Taking a Patient's Sexual History

The Importance of Taking a Sexual History

A sexual history is necessary for all patients to provide information to guide risk-reduction counseling, to identify those at risk for chlamydia, to recognize those at risk for other sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, and to identify what anatomic sites are suitable for STD screening.

All sexually active women aged twenty-five and younger should be screened for lower genital tract chlamydial infections regardless of risk behavior.

On the last page of this guide we have included a basic sexual history template for you to administer to your patients to determine their risk for chlamydia and other STDs. This history can be taken by you as part of the history and physical, or done by your patients as a self administered questionnaire. Save this page and make copies for ongoing clinic use. Please note that this is a template that may not be culturally appropriate for some patients.

Getting Started: Talking with Teens and Adults

Introductory Statements & Questions - Teens

Care needs to be taken when introducing sensitive topics such as sexuality with teenagers. It is important to interview the teen alone and reinforce confidentiality. Start with asking about neutral topics like school, sports, or other activities. Discussions should be appropriate for the teen's developmental level and you should be explicit.

If you identify that the teen is sexually active, you will want to clarify what kind of sex she/he has engaged in. Some teenagers have different definitions of sex.

Introduction and Questions

"Now I am going to take a few minutes to ask you some sensitive questions that are important for me to help you be healthy. Anything we discuss will be completely confidential. I won't discuss this with anyone, not even your parents, without your permission."

"Some of my patients your age have started having sex. Have you had sex?"

or

"What have you done to protect yourself from, AIDS, HIV, or other STDs?"

Introductory Statements - Adults

Care and confidentiality are also important when discussing sexuality with adult patients. The following introduction can help you approach the subject with your patients.

Introduction

"Now I am going to take a few minutes to ask you some direct questions about your sexual health. These questions are very personal, but it is important for me to know so I can help you be healthy. I ask these questions to all of my patients regardless of age or marital status and they are just as important as other questions about your physical and mental health. Like the rest of this visit, this information is strictly confidential."



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Chlamydia Action Coalition.

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The Five “P”s

Partners, Prevention of Pregnancy, Protection from STDs, Practices, and Past STDs

1. Partners

For sexual risk, it is important to determine the number and gender of a patient's sexual partners. One should make no assumptions of partner gender in the initial history taking. If multiple partners, explore for more specific risk factors, such as condom use with partners and partner's risk factors, such as, other partners, injection drug use, history of STDs and drug use with sex. If one partner, ask about length of the relationship and partner's risk, such as, other partners and injection drug use. If the patient has sex with both men and women, **repeat** these questions for each specific gender.

Questions:

- “Do you have sex with men, women, or both?”
- “In the past two months, how people have you had sex with?”
- “In the past 12 months, how many people have you had sex with?”

2. Prevention of Pregnancy

Based on partner information from the prior section, you may determine that the patient is at risk of becoming pregnant or of causing a pregnancy. If so, determine first if a pregnancy is desired.

Questions:

- “Are you trying to get pregnant?” (Women)
- “Are you and a partner trying to get pregnant?” (Men)

If no,

- “Are you concerned about getting pregnant or getting your partner pregnant?”
- “What are you doing to prevent a pregnancy?”

3. Protection from STDs

With this open-ended question, you allow different avenues of discussion: condom use, monogamy, patient self-perception of risk, and perception of partner's risk. If you have determined that the patient has had one partner in the past 12 months and that partner has had no other partners, then infrequent or no condom use may not warrant risk-reduction counseling. Regardless of the patient's risk behavior, if the patient is a woman and is 25 or younger, she should be screened for chlamydia.

Question:

- “What do you do to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases and HIV?”

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The Five “P”s (con’t)

Partners, Prevention of Pregnancy, Protection from STDs, Practices, and Past STDs

4. Practices

If the patient has had more than one partner in the past year or a partner with other partners, you may want to explore further her/his sexual practices and condom use. Asking about other sex practices will guide risk reduction strategies and identify anatomical sites from which to collect specimens for STD testing.

Introduction and Questions:

“I am going to be more explicit about the kind of sex you have been having over the last year so I understand your risks for STDs”

- “Do you have vaginal sex, meaning “penis in vagina sex”?”

If answer is yes, “Do you use condoms: never, sometimes, most of the time or always for this kind of sex?”

- “Do you have anal sex, meaning “penis in rectum/anus sex”?”

If answer is yes, “Do you use condoms: never, sometimes, most of the time, or always for this kind of sex?”

- “Do you have oral sex, meaning “mouth on penis/vagina”?”

For condom answers:

If answer is “never”, then: “Why don’t you use condoms?”

If answer is “sometimes”, then: “In what situations, or with whom, do you not use condoms?”

Additional Questions to Identify HIV and Hepatitis Risk

Immunization history for hepatitis A and B can be noted at this point, as well as past HIV testing. Hepatitis A immunization is recommended for men who have sex with men (MSM) and intravenous drug users (IDU).

- “Have you or any of your partners ever injected drugs?”
- “Have you or any of your partners ever had sex with prostitutes?”
- “Have you ever gotten hepatitis B vaccine (all 3 doses)?”
- “Have you ever gotten hepatitis A vaccine (2 doses)?” (only if MSM, IDU)
- “Have you ever been tested for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS?”

5. Past History of STDs

A history of prior gonorrhea or chlamydia infections increases a person’s risk of repeat infection. Recent past STDs indicates a higher risk behavior.

Questions:

- “Have you ever had an STD?”

If yes, “Do you know what the infection was and when was it?”

- “Have any of your partners had an STD?”

If yes, “Do you know what the infection was and when was it?”

Finishing Up

By the end of this section of the interview, the patient may have come up with information, or questions that she/he was not ready to discuss earlier. Ask the following question to finish up your visit:

“Is there anything else about your sexual practices that I need to know about to ensure you good health care?”

At this point, thank the patient for honesty and praise protective behaviors. For a patient identified at higher risk for STDs, be sure to praise the safer sex practices you have identified. After reinforcing positive behavior, it is appropriate to specifically address concerns regarding higher risk practices. Your expression of concern can then lead to your risk reduction counseling or a counseling referral.

Patient Name: _____

Patient ID: _____

Patient-Administered Sexual History Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to fill out these questions about your sexual health. Your information is strictly confidential. This form will be shared with no one but your health care provider. Your honest answers will help your provider to provide the best care possible and work with you to help you be healthy. Leave all questions blank that do not apply to you.

1. Have you ever had sex (vaginal sex or penis in anus or rectum)? ☐ Yes ☐ No*

***If you answer no, skip to question 10.**

2. How many partners have you had sex with **in the past year**?

☐ No partners ☐ One partner ☐ More than one partner

3. Do you have sex with...

☐ Males only ☐ Females only ☐ Both

4. What method(s) do you currently use to prevent a pregnancy, if applicable? (Check all that apply)

☐ Condoms (for men or for women) ☐ Foam, spermicides, film or suppositories ☐ Nothing
☐ Oral contraceptives (birth control pills) ☐ Depo provera shot or Norplant
☐ Rhythm method or withdrawal ☐ I/my partner are trying to get pregnant
☐ I am not concerned with getting pregnant
☐ Other (please list): _____

5. How often do you use condoms with vaginal sex?

☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐ I do not have vaginal sex

6. How often do you use condoms with anal sex (penis in anus or rectum)?

☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐ I do not have anal sex

7. Have you ever been told by a doctor or nurse that you have a sexually transmitted disease?

☐ No ☐ Yes (circle all that apply)

Chlamydia	Genital herpes	Genital warts
Gonorrhea	PID	HIV
Trichomonas	Syphilis	Other: _____

If yes, when was the last time you had one of these diseases? (Month/Year) _____

8. Have any of your sexual partners...

a. Had a sexually transmitted disease? ☐ No ☐ I don't know ☐ Yes _____

b. Had other partners while still in a relationship with you? ☐ No ☐ I don't know ☐ Yes

c. Had sex with prostitutes? ☐ No ☐ I don't know ☐ Yes

d. Injected drugs? ☐ No ☐ I don't know ☐ Yes

9. Have you ever had the hepatitis B vaccine (3 injections)?

☐ No ☐ I don't know ☐ Yes (all 3 doses) ☐ Yes (less than 3 doses)

10. Have you ever been tested for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS? ☐ No ☐ Yes

11. Have you ever injected drugs? ☐ No ☐ Yes

12. How many drinks of beer, wine or hard liquor did you have in the past week? _____ drinks

13. Have you had sex while under the influence of alcohol or drugs in the past year? ☐ No ☐ Yes

14. Have you ever had sex when you didn't want to? ☐ No ☐ Yes

Adapted with permission from the California Chlamydia Action Coalition.