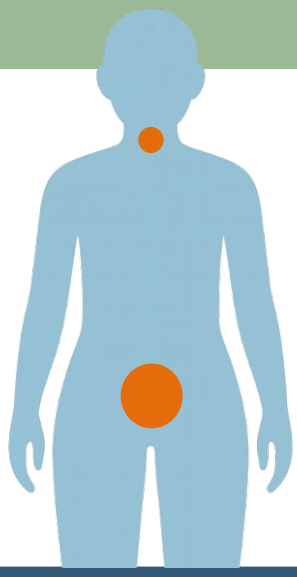
Expanding STI Testing for Individuals with Opposite-Sex Partners

Policy Brief · September 2025

The Case for Routine Extragenital Screening

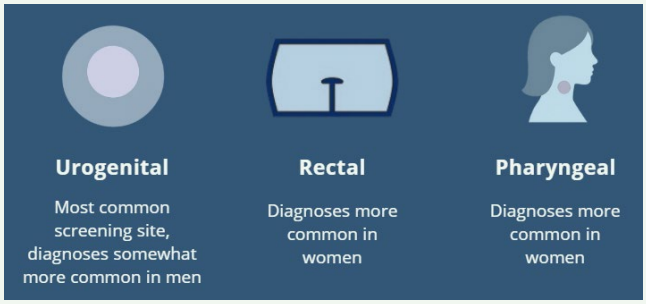


Chlamydia and gonorrhea remain two of the most commonly reported STIs in the United States, yet current testing practices likely underestimate their true prevalence. Standard screening frequently targets only the genital area, overlooking rectal and pharyngeal infections that can occur without symptoms and contribute to ongoing transmission.

Research shows the critical role of extragenital testing in identifying hidden infections and ensuring accurate prevalence estimates. Without these data, health departments, providers, and policymakers risk underestimating the burden of disease and missing opportunities to strengthen STI prevention and control.

KEY FINDINGS

- 25 studies (2010 – 2023) reviewed
- Screening frequency: urogenital > rectal > pharyngeal
  - Women with opposite sex partners = more often screened extragenitally
- Diagnosis among men & women with opposite sex partners



- Many extragenital infections are missed when only urogenital testing performed

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Update screening guidelines** to include extragenital testing for populations with higher likelihood of exposure based on reported sexual practices
- **Fund training & resources** for providers to support expanded screening
- **Launch awareness campaigns** to normalize multi-site testing and reduce stigma

IMPLICATIONS

Missed infections → ongoing spread

When extragenital sites are not tested, infections often remain undetected and untreated, allowing continued transmission in the community.

Many without symptoms → hidden risk

Extragenital infections frequently occur without noticeable genital symptoms, meaning patients may unknowingly carry and spread STIs without timely diagnosis.

Prevalence underestimated → weak policy decisions

Relying only on urogenital testing produces incomplete data, which undermines public health planning and contributes to policies and resource allocations that may not address the true scope of STI transmission.

POLICY LINKAGES

CDC Screening Recommendations
HHS STI National Strategic Plan, 2021–2025
USPSTF Screening Guidelines

Public health agencies should act now to integrate extragenital screening into routine care to avoid continued underdiagnosis and preventable transmission.

Based on STI screening research among individuals with opposite-sex partners, led by researchers at the University of Washington. Learn more here.

CAMP
Coalition for Applied Modeling for Prevention

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