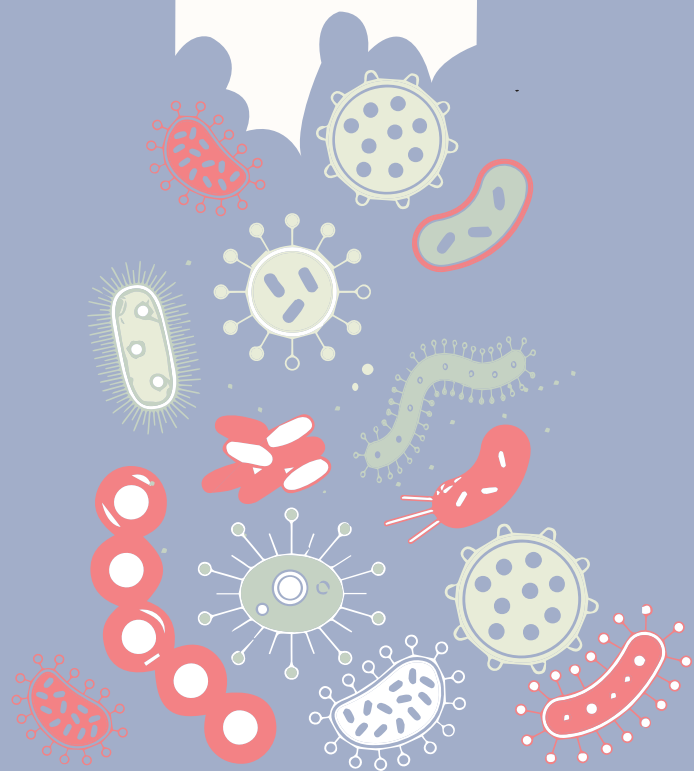


let's
talk
about
stds



and why they've
been rising in the
last few years

Bing! Your phone goes off. As you check your phone, you see a notification from the Grindr app! Someone in your area is interested in going on a date! If you are an adolescent in the 21st century, you have probably had this experience, whether it be with Grindr, Tinder, OkCupid, ChristianMingle.com, or whichever dating app you prefer. As dating becomes more casual and hookup culture becomes increasingly normalized, STDs are becoming more common. Since hookup culture, especially among high school students, doesn't typically include making sure your consenting partner is STD free, the likelihood of contracting a sexually transmitted infection increases. Because dating can be as easy as pushing a button, getting an STD is just a click away.

The dwindling stigma surrounding premarital sex and young people becoming more open to casual sex have both contributed to the rise of hookup culture. Unfortunately, it has not been without consequence, as the rate of STDs has risen dramatically to reach record highs in the United States, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's 2018 analysis.

However, these new online developments are not only to blame. According to CDC's national budget report, the National Coalition of STD Directors have seen a 40% drop in federal funding, which means termination of prevention programs, closing of STD clinics, and lowering the ability of states to effectively respond to outbreaks.

"I think the stigma surrounding STDs leads to fewer discussions about them, which means there isn't as many conversations about them," SA Junior Dallas Ford said. "They're being overlooked, especially by the government, even though it is a pressing issue."

The United States Federal healthcare funding has lost more than \$16 billion per year for diseases that are completely preventable, according to the NCSTD. Since the amount of syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia cases have skyrocketed to 2.3 million in 2017, a 200,000

prevention tips



more cases from 2016, the US now has the most STDs in the industrialized world.

Though the diseases are completely preventable and easily treated, the spike in contraction rate has led to unanticipated consequences. Simple STIs left untreated can lead to infertility in women, birth of babies with syphilis, and the possibility of untreatable gonorrhea. As gonorrhea is left untreated and allowed to mutate and grow stronger, it becomes resistant to existing antibiotics, according to a recent study by the CDC. However, the dangerous long term effects that STDs can have are not widely known, which is where the lack of treatment stems from.

“I think it would have been nice to be educated more on the subject of sex,” SA Junior Walter Johnson said. “I didn’t know that leaving infections untreated could decrease your chances of having kids.”

Leaving STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis untreated can also lead to ectopic pregnancies, where the fetus grows outside the uterus, and an increased risk of contracting HIV. Though STDs are easily preventable with the use of physical contraceptives like condoms or dental dams, lack of education also contributes to their spread. Contrary to the push to expand sex education in America, the cut in funding has caused knowledge to dwindle again. Most believe that condoms are only useful for preventing pregnancy and don’t realize the protection they provide against diseases.

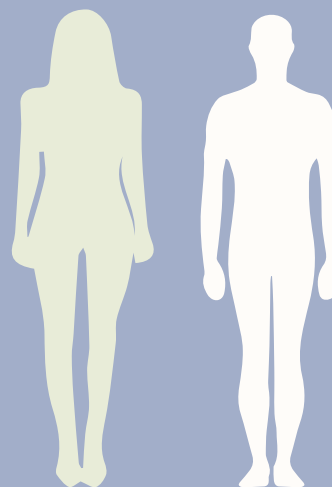
“I personally think that quality human growth and development education during middle and high school plays a vital role in helping to reduce the risks of disease, unwanted pregnancy, and the social and emotional trauma that can come with premature, unplanned sexual encounters,” Director of Wellness and Upper School counselor Lauren Powell said.

Even if adolescents are educated in STD prevention, once a disease is contracted, treatment is harder to obtain, since health clinics are forced to close early and are open for a shorter period of time due to federal budget cuts.

However, even if a young adult or adolescent had contracted an STD, very few would be willing to come forward and receive treatment. The negative stigma surrounding STDs, which millions of people are diagnosed with each year, leads to lack of treatment and further endangers young women and men. STDs can also be asymptomatic, so the person affected would not even be aware that they are carrying an infection, and not pursue treatment.

“Sadly, most high school students think they are immune to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, but the truth is EVERYONE has to be safe and smart about their sexual health,” Powell said. “Teens in Mississippi need to be especially careful, because we have high rates of STD’s in our state. Just because you know what you have done, does not mean that you know what your partner has done.”

As our country journeys into a new decade, we can see this as an opportunity for improvement and a fresh start in which we can hopefully reduce the amount of people affected by sexually transmitted infections. However, because infections are inevitable, increasing the availability of treatment centers as well as raising awareness of safe sex practices are both positive changes that can be made as we turn the page. Be sure to get yourself tested, and be vigilant in staying safe in the new decade!



**1 in 2 people will
contract an STD
before the age of 25**