

**STI Prevalence in Elders**

**A Research Paper by the All4Smiles Research Team**

**January 2025**

## **Abstract**

STIs (or sexually transmitted infections) are often associated with younger to middle-aged populations. However, rates of STI infections have gone up for elderly individuals with the advent of more social nursing homes and personal connections. In this paper, we will explain the rise in STIs among seniors, go over how certain factors contributed to this rise (e.g., improper condom use, lack of knowledge of STIs, and the relation of life expectancy), how elderly individuals can take steps to prevent STI infection (e.g., vaccines, and PrEP for HIV), and what doctors and health professionals can do to lessen current rates.

## **Table of Contents**

1) Introducing the Rise in STIs Among Elders.....	<b>4</b>
2) Factors Contributing to the Rise in STIs.....	<b>5-6</b>
3) How Elderly Individuals Can Prevent STIs.....	<b>7</b>
4) Works Cited.....	<b>8-9</b>

## **Introducing the Rise in STIs Among Elders**

**By: Ifra Iyoob**

According to the American Medical Association, rates of syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia have more than doubled among those 55 or older in the past 10 years. For those aged 65 and older, chlamydia cases have actually more than tripled between 2010 and 2030, gonorrhea cases have increased almost sixfold, and syphilis cases have skyrocketed by nearly tenfold.

Ironically, STIs also rose dramatically during COVID-19, with a study of health insurance claims finding that sexually transmitted infections rose by nearly 24% in the 65-or-older age group. Of those STIs, human papillomavirus (HPV) saw the largest increase. It is important to note that HPV is a devastating infection, causing around 44,000 cases of cancer in the United States per year.

In fact, COVID-19 appears to have had a significant association with the increase in STI cases. According to recent federal reports from the years 2020 and 2021, syphilis infections surged a whopping 32 percent. Other records show that collective cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis increased by 7 percent from 2017 to 2021. Health professionals believe that the actual number of STIs may be even higher, as many cases often go undiagnosed.

There also exists a gender component that contributes to the increase in cases. Studies have shown that while syphilis diagnoses rose among both sexes, it grew faster among female elders: there was a 46.5% increase among women compared to a 22.9% increase among men.

## **Factors Contributing to the Rise in STIs**

**By: Evelyn Yao**

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) spread through sexual activity and are caused by bacteria, viruses, and parasites. These have serious consequences, as some can be cured but others, like HIV, cannot. These infections transmit through contact with infected bodily fluids like semen, vaginal fluids, and blood, and symptoms range from sores, bumps, discharge, and pain during urination. Recently, at the start of 2025, STIs have seen a rise among older adults. According to the American Medical Association, STIs among adults 65 and older have more than doubled in the United States in the last decade due to a variety of factors. According to a 2018 AARP survey, about 40% of people 65–80 are sexually active, and nearly two-thirds of older adults are interested in sex. Specifically, 26% of 60- to 69-year-olds had sex weekly, as well as 17% of those 70 or older. With sexual activity becoming more frequent among the older population, the risk of contracting STIs is also more prevalent, so raising awareness about contributing factors is essential.

A driving factor of rising rates of STI infection is the lack of use of condoms. Condoms are thin barrier devices used during sexual intercourse to prevent pregnancy and discourage the spread of STIs. They are commonly made of latex, plastic, and lambskin, and serve as the best protection against STIs. However, though older people are healthier and staying sexually active longer, their use of condoms is very low, with only about 3% of 60-year-olds or older using condoms in 2014. The low condom use is attributed to a perceived lack of pregnancy risk, as many older adults, especially postmenopausal women, have low fertility and thus do not see a use for condoms. Additionally, a lack of awareness about STIs causes older adults to not recognize the dangers of STIs. They may not be aware of the importance of condoms in reducing

diseases and may have forgotten sex education or have outdated sex education. Some older adults may also suffer from conditions that cause discomfort when using condoms, such as vaginal dryness. In senior homes, healthcare providers may also not routinely discuss sexual health, contributing to a lack of sexual education. A United States survey of nursing home directors found that sexual activity was common in nursing homes due to the seniors finding new partners, so it is important that these older adults are aware of the risks of their sexual activity and take proper action to reduce the risk of contracting STIs.

Furthermore, increased life expectancy can also contribute to the rise of STIs. Because women tend to live longer than men, this creates a gender imbalance and shortage of men that have women switching multiple partners. Due to the increased sexual activity between new sexual partners, the chance of contracting STIs increases as the partners must get used to someone new and risk the chance of transmission due to a long sexual history. Since longer lifespans means more time to be sexually active, older adults have more opportunities to experience multiple partnerships and gain increased exposure to different individuals who may have STIs. Additionally, higher divorce rates can also lead to more people reentering the dating scene and engaging in sexual activity. Some stigma is also attached to discussing sex, which makes it difficult for older adults to seek testing, treatment, or support.

Ultimately, a lack of condom use, lack of knowledge regarding sexual health and STIs, increased life expectancy, and stigma attached to sexual activity all contribute to the recent rise in STIs among older adults. These seniors need special care in ensuring they receive proper sexual education and are staying safe.

## How Elderly Individuals Can Prevent STIs

By: Mumtahina Hemi

While sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are often associated with younger populations, rates of STIs among older adults have been steadily rising. Protecting sexual health remains important at every age. Here are several ways elderly individuals can reduce their risk of STIs:

- **Vaccinations:**

*Vaccines can protect you against certain STIs*

- **HPV Vaccine:** Although typically recommended for younger people, in some cases, adults age up to 45 may benefit. Talk to a healthcare provider to see if it's appropriate.
- **Hepatitis B Vaccine:** Strongly recommended for all adults who have not been previously vaccinated.

- **Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV:**

*Medication*

- PrEP is a daily medication that significantly lowers the risk of getting HIV. It can be a good option for older adults who are at higher risk, especially if they have new or multiple partners.

- **Consistent Condom Use:**

*Contraceptives*

- Condoms, when used correctly, remain one of the best ways to prevent many STIs, including HIV, gonorrhea, and chlamydia.

- **Regular STI Screening:**

Routine STI testing is crucial, even without symptoms. Many infections can be silent, especially in older adults. Early detection means better outcomes and less chance of unknowingly spreading infections.

- **Open Communication with your Healthcare Provider:**

Discuss sexual health openly with your doctor. Many healthcare providers can recommend personalized prevention strategies and screenings based on your specific needs.

Remember! Feeling embarrassed should never come at the expense of your health. Be educated on these topics and always stay safe!

## Works Cited

- American Medical Association & American Medical Association. (2025, January 6). With STIs on rise among older adults, here's what doctors can do. *American Medical Association*.  
<https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/population-care/stis-rise-among-older-adults-here-s-what-doctors-can-do#:~:text=Rates%20of%20syphilis%2C%20gonorrhea%2C%20and,Fryhofer%20explained>.
- STD cases rose 5% from 2020 to 2023, with biggest jumps among older adults, data show*. (n.d.). Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy.  
<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/sexually-transmitted-infections/std-cases-rose-5-2020-2023-biggest-jumps-among-older-adults-data>
- UHBlog. (2023, July 11). Why STIs are on the rise in older adults. *University Hospitals*.  
<https://www.uhhospitals.org/blog/articles/2023/07/why-stis-are-on-the-rise-in-older-adults>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, February 2). Hepatitis B vaccination for adults. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/vaccadults.htm>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, January 26). Screening recommendations and considerations referenced in treatment guidelines and original sources. CDC.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/std/prevention/screeningreccs.htm>
- Mayo Clinic. (2022, October 12). HPV vaccine: Who needs it, how it works. Mayo Clinic.  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/hpv-vaccine/about/pac-20385096>
- Mayo Clinic. (2022, September 29). PrEP for HIV prevention. Mayo Clinic.  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/prep-for-hiv-prevention/about/pac-2048890>



Mayo Clinic. (2022, June 11). Safe sex: Tips for older adults. Mayo Clinic.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/sexual-health/in-depth/safe-sex/art-2004612>