



## Summary of Findings from a new Public Knowledge and Attitudes Survey on Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

As a major new report by the Institute of Medicine focuses national attention on the sexually transmitted disease (STD) epidemic raging in this country, many Americans do not know key facts about STDs, according to a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation. When asked what STDs they could name, only 23 percent of Americans ages 18-64 mentioned Chlamydia, the most common STD and, according the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the most prevalent reportable infectious disease of any kind. Just 2 percent could name Trichomoniasis or "Trich," the STD with the second highest incidence in the U.S. at 3 million estimated cases annually. And, one out of ten (12%) could not name any. When it comes to the dangerous link between STDs and HIV, a majority of Americans under the age of 65 -- 56 percent -- are unaware that STD infections increase susceptibility to the HIV virus.

### What Americans Know About STDs

Americans between the ages of 18-64 are well-versed on the basic facts about STDs -- nine out of ten (93%) know all are preventable and eight out of ten (80%) know some are not curable -- yet they are less familiar with some of the most common STDs. More than a majority are able to name, unprompted, several of the most harmful ones, including: Gonorrhea (68%); AIDS or HIV (60%); and Syphilis (53%).

**The Real Facts: The Most Common STDs**

STD	Estimated Annual Incidence in U.S.	Is It Curable?
Chlamydia	4,000,000	Yes
Trichomoniasis or "Trich"	3,000,000	Yes
Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)	>1,000,000	Yes
Gonorrhea	800,000	Yes
HPV or Genital Warts	500,000 - 1,000,000	No
Genital Herpes	200,000 - 500,000	No
Syphilis	101,000	Yes
HIV/AIDS	80,000	No

More than four out of ten (45%) say they personally know someone who has had an STD, yet few believe most people take the precautions necessary to reduce the rate of infection. Only 11 percent of Americans think most people would tell a new sexual partner if they had a STD, and only 22 percent believe someone with a STD would use a condom every time they had sex.

### **Americans Endorse a Wide-range of Policy Options to Confront the Spread of STDs**

Americans are especially supportive of STD prevention and education efforts geared toward teens, who account for 3 million or one quarter of the STD infections occurring each year in the U.S., making them one of groups hardest hit by the epidemic. More than nine out of ten (95%) think high schools should provide teens with information about STDs, and a majority (53%) support making condoms available in the schools to help teens protect themselves against STDs. There is little support for recent federal and state legislative attempts to require teens to get their parents' permission before getting tested or treated for STDs: the vast majority -- 67 percent -- oppose such a policy. In addition, more than six out of ten Americans (66%) think that the government should require all health insurance plans to pay for STD tests.

### **Confidentiality Concerns in Testing and Treatment of STDs**

Confidentiality is a factor in people's decisions about where to get tested for STDs and how to pay for their tests and treatment, but it is not as important as the expertise of the clinician they would see. Three out of ten Americans (29%) say confidentiality is the most important issue they would consider in choosing where to get tested, and the same percentage say they would be reluctant to use their normal health insurance arrangement to pay for testing or treatment. However, the number one concern named by a majority (56%) of Americans is the expertise of the person giving the test. Another testing option many people (57%) say they would be likely to choose if they thought they had an STD is a not-yet-available home test.

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### **Methodology**

The Kaiser Family Foundation National Survey on Public Knowledge and Attitudes on STDs Other Than AIDS was a random-sample telephone survey of 707 Americans, ages 18 to 64. The survey was conducted for the Foundation between November 8-10, 1996 by Market Facts, Inc. The margin of error in the national sample is plus or minus 4 percent.

The Kaiser Family Foundation, based in Menlo Park, California, is a non-profit, independent national health care philanthropy and is not associated with Kaiser Permanente or Kaiser Industries. The Foundation's work is focused on four main areas: health policy, reproductive health, HIV, and health and development in South Africa.

Copies of the complete questionnaire and national top line data from the survey discussed in this release (ask for doc. #1206) are available free-of-charge by calling the Kaiser Family Foundation's publication request line at 1 (800) 656-4533. Additional background information about sexually transmitted disease prepared for the briefing at which these findings were presented are also available through this same service (ask for doc. #1207).