What's in Your Mouth?: Oral Health & Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Summary Handout – November 2026

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Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be passed through oral sexual contact. Many common STIs affect not only the genitals but also the mouth, throat and oral tissues. Dental professionals play a key role in recognizing oral signs of infection, providing guidance and referring patients for sexual health care.

What Are STIs?: STIs are caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi or parasites acquired through sexual contact. An STI becomes an STD once it leads to symptoms or disease.

Common STIs: Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Syphilis, Herpes (HSV), HPV, HIV, Mycoplasma genitalium, Trichomoniasis and others such as mpox, scabies, and pubic lice.

STIs to be discussed include: Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, HPV (human papilloma virus), HSV (herpes simplex virus). We will review clinical syndromes, testing, transmission and risk.

General Prevention: Patients

- Use barrier protection (condoms, dental dams) during oral sex.
- Get regular STI testing based on risk and symptoms.
- Discuss sexual history openly with healthcare providers.
- Vaccinate when eligible (HPV, hepatitis A/B, mpox).

Guidance for Dental Professionals

- Follow standard infection control practices: gloves, masks, eye protection, proper sterilization.
- Recognize signs of oral STIs and avoid elective procedures when active HSV lesions are present.
- Prevent cross-contamination of tools and surfaces.
- Counsel patients on oral health and STI risks; refer for testing and treatment when needed.

Local Resources

Erie County Sexual Health Center: Jesse Nash Health Center, 608 William Street, Buffalo

- STI testing and treatment, PEP, PrEP, DoxyPEP
- Vaccinations: hepatitis A/B, mpox, HPV
- Free condoms
- Open 5 days/week; all ages and genders welcome; no one turned away for inability to pay

Erie County Dental Hygiene Program: Provides oral health education to local schools and communities.
More info: https://www3.erie.gov/health/oral-health-dental-services

For questions: **erie.gov/health** | **health@erie.gov**