SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION TESTING

There is no single test—blood, urine, or physical exam—which tests for all STI’s. Different STI’s require different types of test. Also, sometimes tests can be negative even though you have the disease (so-called “false-negatives”). Certainly testing can be helpful, but it’s no guarantee against STI’s and should not be used to replace preventive measures such as using condoms and reducing the number of sexual partners.

Also, be advised that even if you have insurance, there may be a charge for the testing, so you may wish to check with your insurer prior to having tests done.

If you need multiple tests done or have multiple problems, you may be asked to schedule more than one appointment, and you will also need a follow-up appointment for the results.

The following is a brief overview of STI’s and their tests and treatment:

- **Chlamydia** is a bacterial infection that can be treated and cured with antibiotics. Typical symptoms are painful urination and mucousy discharge from the vagina or penis, although women often have no symptoms. Testing involves taking a sample of fluid from a man’s penis or a woman’s cervix or testing a sample of urine.

- **Gonorrhea** is another bacterial infection that can be treated and cured with antibiotics. It causes symptoms and signs that are similar to chlamydia, and testing is also similar to testing for chlamydia.

- **Syphilis** is a bacterial infection that can be treated and cured with antibiotics. It usually causes a painless sore (called a chancre) at the site of infection; after the chancre heals; the disease may not cause any symptoms for years. Testing involves a blood sample.

- **HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)** may cause no specific symptoms early in the infection, and then years later may cause many different conditions. Blood testing can be done confidentially through your provider (and requires signing an informed consent), or can be done anonymously through the Student Wellness Center or at the Columbus Health Department. The Student Wellness Center (located at RPAC) uses the Orasure Test, which is an oral test, not a blood test. Treatment involves antiviral medications. However, there is no cure.

- **Genital Warts** are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). It causes painless fleshy growths on the skin in the genital area. In many cases, warts are not visible to the naked eye. This virus can also cause abnormal results on Pap tests and lesions on a woman’s cervix. Women who are sexually active need annual Pap tests. Majority of HPV infection resolves without treatment, treatment is by means of freezing the genital warts with liquid nitrogen, or by application of various chemicals. However, there is no cure.

- **Herpes** is caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV). It is spread through contact with skin or a mucous membrane on which the virus is present. Typically, painful sores appear at the site of the infection, which crust over before healing over a period of 1-4 weeks. Episodes may recur, and the virus can be transmitted then, or even when there are no symptoms. The best test is taking a culture
of a sore when you have an outbreak. Antiviral medications like acyclovir can keep your outbreaks under control, but not cure you.

- **Molluscum Contagiosum** is a benign viral infection which causes small, pearly nodules to appear on the skin, and which can be detected on the physical exam. Treatment is by freezing or curettage of the nodules, although they may go away without treatment.

- **Hepatitis A** is a liver infection that is caused by a virus. The virus is found in stool of persons with Hepatitis A. It is usually spread by close personal contact and sometimes by eating food or drinking water containing the Hepatitis A virus. Sexual transmission of Hepatitis A can occur between men who have sex with men. It can cause mild flu-like symptoms, jaundice, and severe stomach pains and diarrhea. Testing involves a blood sample. A 2-dose vaccine for prevention of this disease is available.

- **Hepatitis B** is a liver infection that is caused by a virus. The virus is transmitted through blood or other infected body fluids. It usually causes vomiting, flu-like symptoms, and jaundice during the initial infection, but then the infection may persist without causing any symptoms. Antiviral medication may be helpful with chronic hepatitis B. Testing involves a blood sample. A 3-dose vaccine for prevention of this disease is available.

- **Hepatitis C** is also a viral liver infection. It may not cause any symptoms for many years. Blood is needed for testing. At present, there is no vaccine for prevention of this disease. The virus is most efficiently transmitted by direct exposure to infected blood (blood transfusion or IV drug use). Sexual exposure can also transmit Hepatitis C.

- **Pubic Lice** ("Crabs") are caused by small insects that infest the genital region. They can be seen on physical exam. Treatment is with pediculocide chemicals like Nix or Kwell.

- **Trichomoniasis** is a parasitic infection caused by a protozoan, which can cause vaginal discharge or irritation in females and occasionally causes urethritis symptoms in men but is usually asymptomatic. The organism can be seen under the microscope in a sample of vaginal fluid. Most commonly, the male is treated when the infection is detected in a female partner. Metronidazole, an antiprotozoal and antibacterial medication, is the treatment of choice.