

STD Testing for College Students

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History and Information

STD rates among the college population have steadily been on the rise for the past decade, with another sharp incline reported in 2017¹. Previously, especially after widespread HIV outbreaks and scares during the 80's and 90's, people who were sexually active may have been more aware of the causes and effects of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, thus more apt to use condoms when engaging in sexual activities and to more frequently get tested for infections and diseases. With more recent generations, however, this information and awareness seems to be losing its touch.

Nationally, and in Minnesota, rates of STDs have almost quadrupled in the past decade in the 15-24 age group. This is now the fourth year in a row that STD rates have reached an all time high. Among the entire population, this younger age group has proven to be a lot more susceptible than before, along with larger amounts of african americans. This includes sharp rises in diagnosed cases of gonorrhea and chlamydia¹. Other affected groups include any range of people who lack access to information about STD prevention or other direct preventative care or treatment, people engaged in illicit drug use, and those who are involved in commercial sex work².

There are a few factors that may be contributing to the rise of STD rates among the college population. Students may be engaging in riskier sexual behaviors such as more frequent partners, and not using physical protection such as condoms. This is thought to be due to the rise of 'hookup culture' through the means of Tinder and other online social dating apps that are popular among this age group³. Within recent years, major federal funding was cut which provided money to major STD research and awareness for various state and community programs which help educate about these issues. Additionally, physicians are decreasingly talking to students and younger patients about the risks and causes of STDs, as well as encouraging testing to be done for them².

Currently, Planned Parenthood is the leader in STD awareness, education, and testing for college students and youth. Their main STD prevention campaign, *Get Yourself Tested*, aims to increase the awareness among this younger population. The campaign started in 2009 in collaboration with MTV. The goal was to reach teens and young adults through popular media and to encourage them to talk about

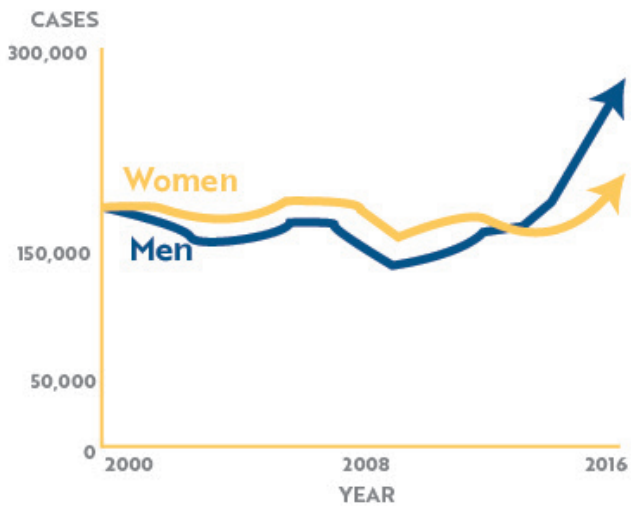
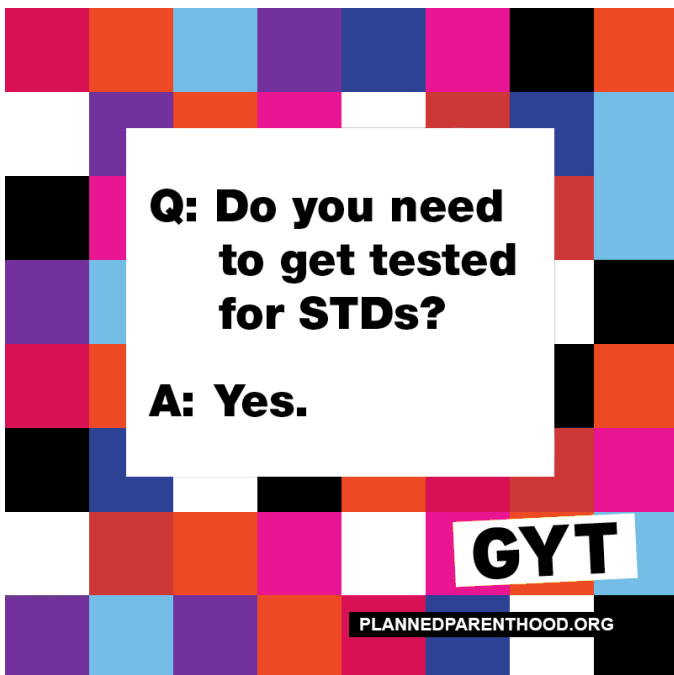


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STD testing as well as get tested. The campaign was relatively successful with driving college students to get tested, but was less successful with high school students⁴. This may have been due to increased stigma about sexual health among high school students, and lack of proper health resources on or around their high school.

Audience

Within the scope of this issue, the 15-24 age population, including all college students, is an at-risk demographic for this STD epidemic. Lack of information about how these diseases and infections spread, reckless sexual behaviors, and knowledge of or access to proper testing are issues that may be compounding this problem. A large part of this specific population is sexually active high school or college students. These students may be engaging in sexual activities with multiple partners at any given time. Without knowledge of any current sexually transmitted infections or diseases, these individuals may be unknowingly spreading infections to other partners. A current figure estimates that roughly 50% of college students do not use a condom while engaging in sex. Additionally, mobile dating apps such as Tinder and Bumble may facilitate somewhat of a hookup culture within college campuses. These encounters may consist of one night stands, and could involve alcohol or other drugs which exacerbate risky behaviors such as not using protection. I suspect that this audience wouldn't respond positively to a message of fear about contracting any sexual diseases, or in abstaining. Within the scope of exhibiting healthier sex practices, I think that sexually active college students would benefit from clear and to-the-point knowledge about the most prevalent STDs, as well as all resources available to them to get tested or learn more.

Similar Campaigns

Get Yourself Tested – Get Yourself Tested is an annual campaign by Planned Parenthood encouraging “young people to take control of their sexual health by promoting regular testing for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and STD awareness as part of a smart, empowered sex life.” Their goal is to get young people aware of and talking about STD testing, and giving them direct information about how and where to get tested. This is the only main campaign geared specifically towards educating young people and college students about STD testing and information⁵.

#DoingIt – DoingIt is a national HIV testing and prevention campaign designed to motivate all adults to get tested for HIV and know their status. They want HIV testing to be a part of everyone's regular health routine to keep themselves



Images from PlannedParenthood.org



Images from CDC.gov.



Image from STDCheck.com.

and their sexual partners safe. It mainly uses personas and stories to convey the perspective of different individuals and couples⁶.

STDcheck.com – STDcheck.com is a website that helps you locate STD testing labs in your area, as well as to check what tests are available and how much they cost. Through the site you can order tests to labs in your area. They also offer a select program which offers STD testing to college students for free in collaboration with certain Universities (which can be found on their site). The site has not launched any formal campaigns, but aligns itself to make testing as easy and convenient as possible⁷.

Differentiation

This campaign will continue efforts of organizations such as Planned Parenthood and the CDC to open honest conversations with youth aged 15-25 about information and education about the risks of STDs and the benefits of getting tested for STDs, as well as resources and availability. STD rates are at an all time and further exacerbated among this young population due to changes in social culture, risky behaviors, lack of information and awareness, and mobile dating apps. My main call to action is to get college students in Duluth to get tested for STDs using the resources available to them in their area. Planned Parenthood's yearly *Get Yourself Tested* campaign is the most similar campaign in scope to what I aim to design, but with a couple major changes.

PP's campaign is a yearly campaign, kicking off every April because April is STD awareness month. They partner with MTV and the CDC to push various content and marketing material to the under 25 population. According to Eastman-Mueller, et al. study, roughly only 30% of college students had ever heard of or been exposed to PP's campaign. This may have been due to the media channels where the messaging was being pushed. Another problem with their campaign was the potentially unclear messaging and branding, represented in their materials as *GYT*. Much of their main branding used the *GYT* letters in large form, but this is not clear enough to grab the immediate attention of what the movement is. Lastly, their campaign lacks consistent messaging and content. The style changes each year with various colorful and patchy/blocky elements, but individual PP regions and divisions often use homemade graphics and material on their sites and media channels to represent the campaign. This is wildly inconsistent and may not be recognized by students even if they have heard of the campaign before.



My goal to differentiate and improve my campaign from Planned Parenthood's *Get Yourself Tested* campaign is to use immediately clear messaging, consistent visual styles/messaging, and to better target what media channels the marketing material is reaching.

Applications & Touch Points

My goal is to use direct messaging to college students in Duluth to inform them of STD testing resources in their area or on their campus, as well as information about STDs and healthy sexual practices. I want to improve on PP's campaign by using targeted social media marketing on Instagram and Facebook, print material or posters near and on college campuses, as well as use community events and tabling to reach and talk to students on campus. The print material could be used to convey important information about various STDs and associated risks, with a clear and decisive call to get tested along with resources. I also want the messaging to be more directly clear with a distinct headline, along with using some sort of cheeky messaging to show that we are not afraid to talk about this topic.



Sources

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