

*Sexuality includes a spectrum of various identities which can describe a person's sexual attraction, behavior and personal identification. When trying to understand the complexity of sexuality, it is also important to understand how to remain healthy and safe during your sexual experiences and within your relationships.*

## ***What is sexuality?***

*Sexuality* can be understood as a spectrum of identities that relate to a person's *sexual orientation*, *sexual behavior* and *sexual identity*. Sexual orientation refers to the sex/gender of the person/people someone is attracted to. For example, a man is attracted to women or a woman is attracted to women, etc. Sexual behavior refers to the relationships of a sexual nature in which a person engages. These relationships can include any number of sexual acts with others, but can also include celibacy, asexuality, and self-pleasure (masturbation). Sexual identity is self-determined and describes the way a person describes their sexuality, sexual orientation and sexual behavior. However, simply because someone identifies as "heterosexual/straight" does not necessarily mean they are not attracted to, and/or have sexual relations with people of their same sex/gender. Sexual identity typically refers to the way you tell others about your sexuality.

## ***What does healthy sexuality mean?***

*Healthy sexuality* means having the knowledge and ability to express one's sexuality in ways that are positive and enriching. Healthy sexuality includes engaging in consensual sexual activities, sexual relationships that are free from violence, knowing the status of your sexual partner(s) past relationships and risk for sexually transmitted infections, and the use of protection during all sexual acts that may result in sexually transmitted infections and/or unwanted pregnancy.

## ***What are STI's and STD's?***

*STI's* are sexually transmitted infections which may result from unprotected intercourse and other sexual activities such as oral sex. The transmission of STI's is possible within heterosexual, homosexual and queer sexually active relationships. The term STI is used rather than sexually transmitted disease (STD) because of the negative connotation of the word "disease." Additionally, "infection" more accurately portrays the possibility of the infected person not displaying symptoms of infection and that many STI's are curable. Types of STI's include chlamydia, genital herpes, gonorrhea, Hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS, human papillomavirus, pubic lice (sometimes referred to as "crabs"), syphilis and trichomoniasis. Each STI has unique symptoms (or sometimes lack of symptoms) - if you are sexually active, the only way to know your status for sure is by being tested for STI's regularly by a health care professional.

## ***What is consent?***

*Consent* means giving and receiving permission to do something or for something to happen. Consensual sex/sexual activities means that everyone involved has given explicit permission and has agreed to engage without any form of coercion, intimidation or threat. Consent should be given and received before every sexual or intimate experience.

## ***How do I use “protection”?***

*Protection* typically refers to the use of condoms and/or dental dams during sexual contact in order to protect against the transmission of STI's (and pregnancy in the case of heterosexual intercourse). Condoms are used to cover the male's penis during intercourse, oral and anal sex. Female condoms are placed inside the female's vagina to protect against STI's and pregnancy during intercourse. Female condoms and male condoms should *never* be used simultaneously. Dental dams are used as protection during oral sex performed on females. If you are unsure how to use any form of protection, be sure to read the instructions or talk to your health care provider. The only 100% way to avoid contracting an STI or unwanted pregnancy is through abstinence.

## ***What is contraception?***

*Contraception* is used as a means of preventing pregnancy. Methods of contraception may include birth control which alters the hormones within a female's body to prevent pregnancy, such as the pill (must be taken every day), a shot (regularly scheduled with your health care provider), a vaginal ring (placed inside the vagina each month), or an intrauterine device (IUD). These methods do not protect against the transmission of STI's. Male condoms, female condoms, diaphragms or cervical caps are other types of contraceptives that can be used during intercourse to prevent pregnancy. Emergency contraception is a pill that must be taken within 72 hours of coitus in the event that other methods of birth control were not used, or were not effective.

## ***Where can I find more information about these topics?***

### **MSU Women's Resource Center**

<http://wrc.msu.edu>

517-353-1635

332 Union Building

### **MSU Olin Health Center**

<http://olin.msu.edu/>

517-884-6546

463 East Circle Drive

### **Ask a Spartan**

A Q&A website for any questions you want to ask anonymously in English or Chinese.

Answers provided by MSU professionals.

<http://askus.msu.edu>

### **Planned Parenthood (Lansing)**

STI testing and sexual health information.

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org>

517-351-0550