

Sexual risk behaviors of our teens, and the accompanying economic and public health implications, are a growing concern. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) traditionally affect individuals of all ages, however, STIs are taking a particularly heavy toll on young people aged 15-24. The CDC estimates that youths aged 15-24 accounted for almost half of the 26 million new sexually transmitted infections that occurred in the United States in 2018 ([CDC, 2021a](#)). Childhood maltreatment, sexual abuse in particular, has been found to be associated with sexual risk behaviors later in life ([London et al., 2017](#)).

- In 2018, 21% of new HIV diagnoses were among young people aged 13-24; 12% young women, 88% young men ([CDC, 2021b](#)).
- From 2014–2016, syphilis rates increased by 24.5% among adolescents aged 15–19 years and 25.4% among young adults aged 20–24 years. Primary and secondary syphilis infections have seen the most dramatic increase, with total national rates at their highest since 1993 ([Shannon & Klausner, 2018](#)).
- Adolescents are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behavior, due in part to the prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive function, not being fully developed ([Steinberg, 2005](#)).
- In 2018, 180,000 babies were born to girls aged 15-19 ([CDC, 2021b](#)). Substance use in adolescence is associated with risky sexual behaviors that lead to STI's, pregnancy, and HIV.
- The direct lifetime medical costs in the United States of new STIs in 2018 totaled nearly \$16 billion ([CDC, 2021c](#)).
- Technology is compounding the problem of STIs in the United States with the use of dating apps such as Tinder. According to Dr. Chin-Hong, The “Tinder effect” has made it easier for people to meet and have multiple sexual exposures which increase risk of STIs ([Chin-Hong et al., 2017](#)).
- Letourneau et al (2018) conducted a study to estimate the U.S. economic impact of child sexual abuse (CSA). Their findings showed the total lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse was estimated to be at least \$9.3 billion ([CDC, 2021d](#); [Letourneau et al., 2018](#)).
 - The lifetime cost for victims of fatal CSA victims is approximately \$1.2 million.
- The average lifetime cost for victims of nonfatal CSA is \$282,734 per female victim, and \$74,691 per male victim ([Letourneau et al., 2018](#)).
 - The article suggested that prevention programming is still a need that is not being addressed and could prove cost-effective ([Letourneau et al., 2018](#)).
 - According to data collected from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, results suggest that a history of forced sex is independently associated with a history of STIs among sexually active adolescent girls and strategies aimed at STI reduction must address sexual victimization ([Upchurch & Kusunoki, 2004](#)).
 - The EARN IT Act would go a long way in the prevention of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) from causing irrefutable harm to child survivors by continual revictimization — furthermore, impacting the economy by decreasing healthcare costs, recidivism, and associated government subsidies.