

# sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

**factoid** 77% of UA students had either one or no sexual partners during the past school year. (2007 Health & Wellness Survey, n= 2162)

## Q. Which STDs are reported to the health department? This seems like a huge invasion of privacy and totally against HIPAA.

A. If you have ever come across information on sexually transmitted disease (STD) trends, you have probably seen the result of disease reporting. Much like other infectious diseases, doctors, health care facilities, medical laboratories and other agencies are required by law to report certain STDs to the state health department. Without the benefit of reporting, health officials would have no systematic way to track and control the spread of disease – which is why notification has been an important part of state law since the early 1900s.

Here in Arizona, HIV, syphilis, genital herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhea and some types of hepatitis are the most common STDs that require reporting by medical providers. In total, 87 communicable diseases – among them, rabies, scabies, West Nile virus, Lyme disease and whooping cough – are mandated, with some requiring immediate reporting to the Arizona Department of Health Services within 24 hours (measles) and others within five working days (syphilis).

Because they include personal information (name, address, demographics) and disease status, STD reports fuel an ongoing debate between assuring personal privacy and protecting public health and the greater good. In fact, the primary piece of federal legislation that guards patient privacy, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (otherwise known as HIPAA) expressly permits the reporting of health information for public health purposes.

Research has shown that some physicians are reluctant to report the disease status of their patients in light of the doctor-patient relationship and others are not always aware which diseases are currently on the list – two factors that have led to underreporting. But whatever your viewpoint on disease notification and its limitations, there is little doubt that it has reduced the prevalence of disease in America for over a century.

Have a question? Send it to [sextalk@email.arizona.edu](mailto:sextalk@email.arizona.edu)

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