

Bacterial Sexually Transmitted Infections

Sample Responses to Patient Portal Messages

The following are examples of asynchronous messages (e.g., MyChart messages) received by telemedicine clinicians for patients tested for gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis after a virtual visit. The messages below assume a diagnosis of gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis has already been established after a virtual visit. The responses below assume the clinician is responding to the patient. Please change “I” to “we” if more appropriate to reflect the practice’s views. Patients should be strongly discouraged from sending asynchronous messages for urgent concerns.

Responses Intended for Adult Patients

- **“I saw a positive test result in my patient portal for something called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. What does this mean?”**
 - **Possible response:** This test result means that you have an infection with a sexually transmitted infection called gonorrhea. This is treatable with an antibiotic. Please make an in-person appointment so that you can receive an antibiotic to treat the gonorrhea with an injection called ceftriaxone. Please abstain from sexual activity until that appointment, and for 7 days after you get the antibiotic and until after any sexual partners have been tested and treated. At that appointment, we will also talk about other tests you may need for other exposures or infections, whether any partners may need to be tested or treated, how to prevent these infections in the future, and plans for followup testing for gonorrhea.¹⁻²
- **“I saw a positive test result in my patient portal for something called *Chlamydia trachomatis*. What does this mean?”**
 - **Possible response:** This test result means that you have an infection with a sexually transmitted infection called chlamydia. This is treatable with antibiotics. I will prescribe you an antibiotic, doxycycline, to take twice a day for 7 days. Make sure to take the antibiotic with food or a glass of water because it can sometimes cause stomach irritation. Doxycycline can make your skin sensitive to sunlight, so be sure to use sunscreen, hats, or long sleeves or long pants if you are spending time outside while on doxycycline. Please abstain from sexual activity until 7 days after you finish the antibiotic and until any partners have been tested and treated. I also would like for you to schedule either an in-person or a telemedicine appointment to discuss other tests you may need for other exposures or infections, whether any partners may need to be tested or treated, how to prevent these infections in the future, and plans for followup testing for chlamydia.³

- **“I saw a positive test result in my patient portal for syphilis. What should I do?”**
 - **Possible response:** Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection that can last in a patient’s system for years. Syphilis test results can be difficult to interpret, but if they are positive, you will need an antibiotic injection to treat the infection. Please make an in-person appointment to discuss the test results. If it does turn out that the syphilis test result is positive, you will need an injection of an antibiotic called penicillin to treat it. Some patients may need more than one injection based on how long they may have had the infection. Please abstain from sexual activity until that appointment. At that appointment, we will also talk about other tests you may need for other exposures or infections, whether any partners may need to be tested or treated, how to prevent these infections in the future, and plans for followup testing for syphilis.⁴⁻⁵
- **“I was just treated for (gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis). When can I be sexually active again?”**
 - **Possible response:** Please abstain from sexual activity until 7 days after you complete treatment, and until your sexual partner or partners have been tested and treated if positive. If a sexual partner also has the infection, they can reinfect you, so all your partners within the last 60 days, and your most recent sexual partner, should be tested and treated. Once you restart sexual activity, be sure to use barrier protection such as condoms to reduce your risk for sexually transmitted infections. Please also set up an appointment over telemedicine or in person to discuss other tests you may need for other exposures or infections, how to prevent these infections in the future, and followup.¹⁻⁵
- **“I was just diagnosed with gonorrhea. What should my partner do?” (ASSUMES NEGATIVE TEST FOR CHLAMYDIA)**
 - **Possible response:** All your sexual partners within the last 60 days, and your most recent sexual partner, should be tested and treated. Please ask your partner or partners to talk to their healthcare provider about how they can be tested and treated. If your sexual partner or partner cannot access medical care to get tested or treated, I can write you a prescription for an antibiotic to give your partner. The antibiotic is a one-time dose of a pill called cefixime. However, it does not work as well as an antibiotic that can be given in a clinic as an injection. Avoid sexual activity until 7 days after you were treated, and after your partner gets treated. I will also send you some information about gonorrhea that you can give your partner.⁶⁻⁷
- **“I was just diagnosed with chlamydia. What should my partner do?” (ASSUMES NEGATIVE TEST FOR GONORRHEA)**
 - **Possible response:** All your sexual partners within the last 60 days, and your most recent sexual partner, should be tested and treated. Please ask your partner or partners to talk to their healthcare provider about how they can be tested and treated. If your sexual partner or partner cannot access medical care to get tested or treated, I can write you a prescription for an antibiotic to give your partner. The antibiotic is one week of a twice-daily pill called doxycycline. Avoid sexual activity until 7 days after you were treated, and after your partner gets

treated. I will also send you some information about chlamydia that you can give your partner.^{3,6}

- **"How can I prevent another sexually transmitted infection?"**
 - **Possible response:** Using a condom with sexual activity each time will reduce your risk of a sexually transmitted infection. Abstaining from oral, vaginal, and anal sex also will eliminate your risk. If you are sexually active, being sexually active with just one partner (and that partner only being sexually active with you) will decrease your risk. There are some medications that may be able to prevent certain types of sexually transmitted infections as well. Please set up a telemedicine or in-person clinic appointment so that we can discuss some of these strategies.¹⁻⁵
- **"How do I know if the infection (syphilis, gonorrhea, or chlamydia) has gone away?"**
 - **Possible response:** This is a good question. We should repeat the test in 3 months to make sure the infection has gone away. If you have been diagnosed with gonorrhea of the throat, we will repeat that test in 2 weeks. Please make an in-person appointment for these tests.¹⁻³
- **"I was recently diagnosed with (gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis). I saw an ad for something called doxy PEP. Is this something I should take?"**
 - **Possible response:** Doxy PEP stands for doxycycline post-exposure prophylaxis. It means taking an antibiotic (doxycycline) within 72 hours of sexual activity to prevent some sexually transmitted infections caused by bacteria. These infections include gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis. It has been tested in gay and bisexual men who have had chlamydia, syphilis, or gonorrhea in the prior year. Please set up a telemedicine or in-person clinic appointment so we can discuss whether you should use this treatment. During this appointment, we can discuss more about how to take doxy PEP and also discuss other tests you will need for other exposures or infections.⁸⁻⁹
- **"I was recently diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection. I saw an ad about a medicine that can prevent HIV. I tested negative for HIV. Should I take this medication?"**
 - **Possible response:** Thank you for asking this question. For people who may be at risk of getting HIV, we can consider pre-exposure prophylaxis. Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, involves taking either a pill medication daily or for a few days around sex or taking a long-acting injection to prevent HIV.¹⁰ People who have had anal or vaginal sex in the past 6 months with a sexual partner with HIV who does not have an undetectable viral load, sexually active people who do not consistently use a condom, or people who have been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease in the past 6 months, could consider taking PrEP. People who inject drugs and have an injection partner with HIV, or share needles, syringes, or other injection equipment can also take PrEP. Please set up a telemedicine or in-person appointment and we can talk more about PrEP.

References

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