“We know that many adolescents underestimate their infection risk and have mistaken ideas about what protects them from STIs and what does not. Just like condoms, abstinence protects only if used consistently and correctly. Because the large majority of young people engage in sexual activity of one form or another—even those who promise to remain abstinent—they need to know how to protect themselves.”

Hannah Brückner, Ph.D.
Professor, Yale University

CARE Tips for Teens:
• Even if you take the virginity pledge, make sure you know how to protect yourself from STIs.

CARE Tips for Parents:
• When talking about sex, don’t leave out important information. Information will not hurt your child or promote sexual behavior.
Virginity pledges are promises made by adolescents and young adults to wait for sex until marriage. Researchers studied whether adolescents who took virginity pledges had lower sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Researchers looked at information from a national study. The study asked young people if they had taken a virginity pledge and also checked for 4 STIs [chlamydia, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus (HPV), and trichomoniasis]. Researchers found no difference in STI rates between pledgers and non-pledgers, although the research shows that young people who took virginity pledges:

- put off having sex
- had fewer sexual partners
- were more likely to wait for sex until marriage

Reasons for similar STI rates between pledgers and non-pledgers may be that:

- Although pledgers put off sex, most of them eventually will have sex before marriage.
- Pledgers are less likely than others to use condoms when they become sexually active.
- Pledgers are much less likely to get tested and treated for STIs.

**Bottom Line**

Virginity pledges do not stop the spread of STIs. Pledgers are less likely to be tested and treated for STIs and less likely to use condoms when they start to have sex. Sexual education should include information on condom use, birth control, and STIs.

**Definitions**

Sexually transmitted infection is an infectious disease that spreads through intimate contact such as vaginal, anal and oral sex. Chlamydia, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus (HPV), and trichomoniasis are common STIs. Most STIs are asymptomatic in most people but easy to diagnose and treat. Treatment is very important to prevent spreading of the disease.