

Sexual Health Behaviors among Missouri College Students

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 26 public and private colleges and universities in the state working to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies, including education, social norming campaigns, policy review and enforcement, and more. This brief includes data for the 23 4-year institutions in the coalition; 2-year campuses participate in a separate version of the survey, and their data is not included in this statewide aggregate. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health have on student health and wellness. This brief will focus on data related to sexual health collected from the 2024 Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (sample size, N = 4956).

Social Aspects: Sugar Dating

The MACHB asks students to report about social aspects of their sexual health, like relationships and dating. A subset of questions focuses on sugar dating, or 'sugaring', which is described in the survey as "providing companion services for money or something of value". 21% of all students surveyed answered that they had participated in sugaring in the past, 5.3% answered that they currently were involved in sugaring, 38% of students preferred not to respond, and 36% of students answered that they never have never participated. Another question asks students if they have ever in their lifetime traded sex, or sexual services to earn money. This question is specific to sexual acts rather than the companionship referenced in the definition of sugaring. Only about 2.3% of the students surveyed answered that they either have previously or are currently providing sexual services to earn money. 96% of students answered that they have not, and 2% preferred not to respond. The students that answered yes to providing sexual services for

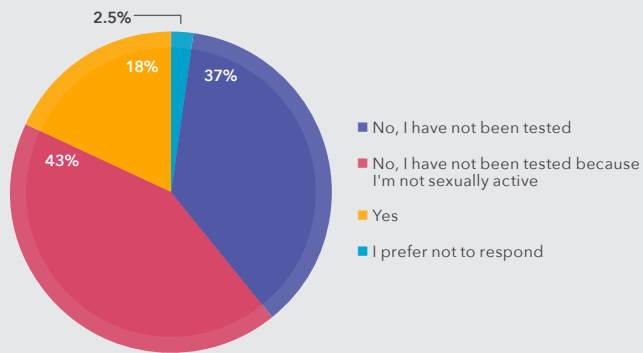
money, were asked where they provide said services. 10% of students answered 'online', 32% of students replied, 'in person', 37% answered 'both online and in person during the same time period', and 22% replied 'both online and in person at different time periods.'

STI Testing & Protective Behaviors

The 2024 MACHB asks students to report a variety of behaviors related to sexual health, including sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing as well as STI and pregnancy prevention. In terms of STI testing behaviors, this year, 43% of students reported that they have not been tested as they are not sexually active. Of sexually active students, 37% indicated that they have not been tested for an STI in the past year, while 18% of students who took the MACHB reported that they have been tested for an STI in the past year. Chart 1 provides an overview of STI testing behaviors.

In addition to asking students to report testing behaviors, the MACHB also asks students to indicate any barriers which have prevented them from

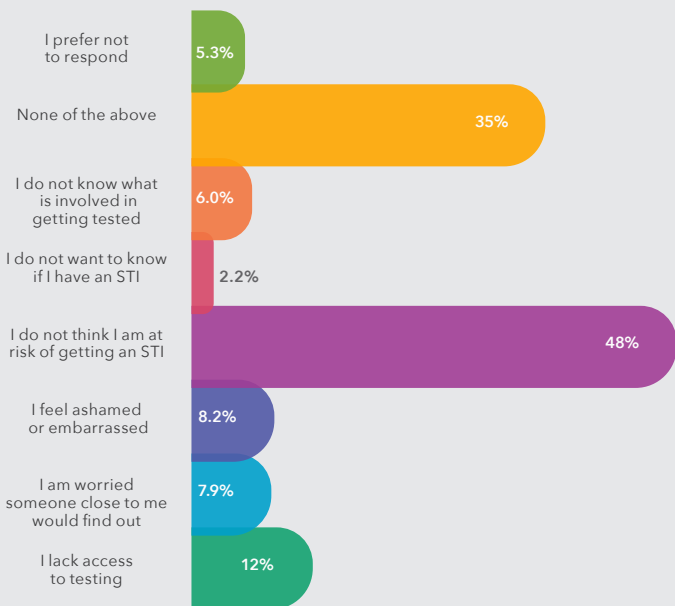
Chart 1: "In the past year, have you been tested for an STI?"



receiving STI testing. Among the 2024 sample, the most commonly cited barriers include students feeling that they are not at risk for getting an STI (48%), lack of access to testing, whether that is due to lack of insurance coverage, lack of testing available, or lack of knowledge as to where to get tested (12%), feeling ashamed or embarrassed (8.2%), being worried about someone close to them finding out (7.9%), or not knowing what is involved in getting tested (6%). An overview of such barriers to testing are included in Chart 2.

Chart 2: "What are the barriers that have ever stopped you from getting tested for an STI?"

(Check all that apply)



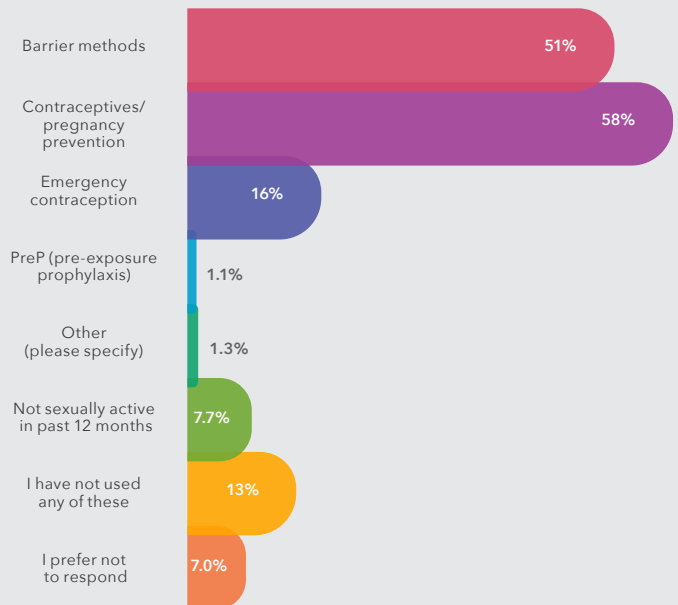
Furthermore, the 2024 MACHB prompts students to indicate any methods of STI or pregnancy prevention

used with sexual partners in the past 12 months. Barrier methods, such as external or internal condoms, dams, or gloves, are common methods used to protect individuals from STIs. 2024 marked an increase in the use of barrier methods since 2023, with 51% of sexually active students reporting using any barrier method in the past year (compared to 48% the previous year).

Contraceptives are items used to prevent pregnancy and typically include condoms, birth control pills, IUD pills, birth control implants, and others. According to the 2024 MACHB sample, 58% of sexually active students reported using a contraceptive method with their sexual partners in the past 12 months. Additionally, 16% of sexually active students reported use of emergency contraceptives, such as Plan B or the "morning after pill." 13% of sexually active students reported using no contraceptives to prevent pregnancy or barrier methods to protect against STIs. Chart 3 depicts contraceptive and barrier method use in 2024.

Chart 3: "What are the barriers that have ever stopped you from getting tested for an STI?"

(Check all that apply)



Summary and Moving Forward

Sexual health is a core part of overall physical health and well-being. It is important for institutions of higher education to understand the sexual health behaviors

of students and help meet their needs related to sexual health education, access to STI testing, and more. It's important to recognize though that a significant portion of Missouri college students are not currently sexually active (43%), but also that most who are sexually active have not been tested for STIs in the past year (37%). Campuses should work to understand the barriers to students getting tested and work to increase access when possible. Additionally, providing free or low-cost options for STI prevention (i.e. barrier methods) is critical to student wellness and success.

Resources

Missouri Family Health Council

The Missouri Family Health Council's mission is to expand, ensure, and empower reproductive and sexual healthcare for all. [Visit mfhc.org to learn more.](https://mfhc.org)

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services has resources and information on STIs, where to access STI testing, and more. Visit their website at [this link](#) to find out more.

Local Public Health Agencies

Local Public Health Agencies (LPHAs) also have resources related to a wide range of public health issues and communicable infections, including STIs. Find your local public health agency by visiting <https://health.mo.gov/living/lpha/>

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

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