

## Research Brief: The Role of Waiting for Marriage in Preventing Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and Infertility, and its Public Policy Implications

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### Introduction

Sexual behavior plays a central role in the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and reproductive health outcomes, including infertility. The decision to delay sexual activity until marriage, often promoted in various religious and cultural contexts, may have significant implications for the prevention of STDs and the preservation of reproductive health. This research brief examines the role of waiting for marriage in reducing the risks of STDs and infertility, explores its potential public policy implications, and outlines the associated cost savings for healthcare systems.

### Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

<https://www.cdc.gov/sti/prevention/index.html>

#### 1. Risk Reduction and Sexual Behavior

Delaying sexual activity until marriage can significantly reduce exposure to sexually transmitted infections, as individuals in long-term, monogamous relationships are less likely to have multiple sexual partners or engage in high-risk behaviors such as unprotected sex. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), multiple sexual partners and inconsistent condom use are two of the key factors contributing to the spread of STDs.<sup>1</sup> By limiting sexual activity to a committed marital relationship, individuals reduce the likelihood of encountering these risks.

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<sup>1</sup> CDC (2018) CDC Fact Sheet: Information for Teens and Young Adults: Staying Healthy and Preventing STDs.

[https://www.ihs.gov/sites/nptc/themes/responsive2017/display\\_objects/documents/sti\\_community/CDC-%20Adolescents%20and%20STDs%20-%20Sexually%20Transmitted%20Diseases%20-%20CDC.pdf](https://www.ihs.gov/sites/nptc/themes/responsive2017/display_objects/documents/sti_community/CDC-%20Adolescents%20and%20STDs%20-%20Sexually%20Transmitted%20Diseases%20-%20CDC.pdf).

Last reviewed April 2024. Accessed December 17, 2025.

## 2. Evidence from Sexual Health Studies

Studies have consistently shown that individuals who wait until marriage to have sex are at a lower risk of contracting STDs. One study<sup>2</sup> demonstrated the increased risk of multiple partners: individuals who had more sexual partners had higher rates of any STD, including chlamydia and gonorrhea, which are prevalent among sexually active adolescents and young adults.<sup>3</sup> These findings suggest that delaying sexual activity can serve as an effective preventive measure against the transmission of STDs.

## Prevention of Infertility

### 1. Impact of STDs on Reproductive Health

Untreated STDs can lead to serious reproductive health issues, including infertility. Infections such as chlamydia and gonorrhea, if left untreated, can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which is a leading cause of infertility in women.<sup>4</sup> In men, untreated STDs can result in conditions like epididymitis, which may also impair fertility.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Delay in Sexual Activity as a Preventive Measure

Waiting until marriage may indirectly contribute to better reproductive health by reducing the risk of contracting infections that lead to infertility. Research demonstrates that early sexual initiation is a significant risk factor for the development of PID, which contributes to infertility.<sup>6</sup> By avoiding early exposure to STDs, individuals who wait until marriage are less likely to experience such complications.

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<sup>2</sup> Rusley, J. C., Tao, J., Koinis-Mitchell, D., Rosenthal, A. E., Montgomery, M. C., Nunez, H., & Chan, P. A. (2022). Trends in risk behaviors and sexually transmitted infections among youth presenting to a sexually transmitted infection clinic in the United States, 2013-2017. *International journal of STD & AIDS*, 33(7), 634–640. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09564624221077785>.

<sup>3</sup> CDC (2021) Sexually Transmitted Infections Treatment Guidelines, Adolescents, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/adolescents.htm#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20prevalence,For%20example%2C%20reported%20rates%20of>. Last reviewed: July 22, 2021. Accessed: Dec. 17, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> CDC (2023) About Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, <https://www.cdc.gov/pid/about/index.html>. Accessed: Dec. 17, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> CDC (2021) Sexually Transmitted Infections Treatment Guidelines, 2021, Epididymitis, <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/epididymitis.htm>. Accessed: Dec. 17, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Greydanus, D. E., & Bacopoulou, F. (2019). Acute pelvic inflammatory disease: A narrative review. *Pediatric Medicine*, 2, <https://pm.amegroups.org/article/view/4950/html#B1>; Kreisel, K., Torrone, E., Bernstein, K., Hong, J., & Gorwitz, R. (2017). Prevalence of Pelvic Inflammatory Disease in Sexually

## Public Policy Implications

### 1. Sexual Education and Public Health Initiatives

Governmental and educational bodies must play an essential role in promoting the benefits of delaying sexual activity until marriage as a method of preventing STDs and infertility. Sexual risk avoidance education programs that emphasize relationship skills, safe dating practices, the Success Sequence,<sup>7</sup> the prosocial value of marriage, family formation, and future children can empower individuals to make informed decisions about their sexual health. Policies that advocate for delayed sexual activity, character development, self-regulation, marriage, and family formation within a framework of personal responsibility, health promotion, and poverty prevention are effective strategies for addressing the rising rates of STDs, particularly among adolescents.

### 2. Funding for Preventive Health Programs

Public health campaigns and initiatives that focus on the prevention of STDs and infertility can be enhanced by advocating for the benefits of sexual risk avoidance. These initiatives could be funded by government programs aimed at reducing healthcare costs associated with STD treatments and infertility treatments. Moreover, encouraging marriage could potentially reduce the frequency of high-risk sexual behaviors that contribute to the spread of infections, cervical cancer, and high healthcare costs.

## Cost Savings and Economic Impact

### 1. Healthcare Savings from Reduced STD Treatment

The economic burden of STDs is substantial. According CDC data from 2018, the direct medical costs of STDs in the United States alone exceed \$16 billion annually<sup>8</sup>. A reduction in the prevalence of STDs

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Experienced Women of Reproductive Age - United States, 2013-2014. *MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report*, 66(3), 80–83. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6603a3>

<sup>7</sup> Caplan (2021). What Does the Success Sequence Mean? *IFS Studies*, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/what-does-the-success-sequence-mean>.

<sup>8</sup> Chesson et al. (2021). The Estimated Direct Lifetime Medical Costs of Sexually Transmitted Infections Acquired in the United States in 2018. *Sexually transmitted diseases*, 48(4), 215–221. <https://doi.org/10.1097/OLQ.0000000000001380>; See also: <https://www.cdc.gov/sti/php/communication-resources/prevalence-incidence-and-cost-estimates.html>.

through delayed sexual activity and marriage could lead to significant savings in healthcare costs, as fewer individuals would require treatment for infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, or cervical cancer caused by HPV.

## **2. Prevention of Infertility Treatments**

Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART) treatments are costly and can place a financial strain on healthcare systems. In 2025, the average cost of one cycle of in vitro fertilization (IVF) was between \$12,000 and \$25,000,<sup>9</sup> with many couples requiring multiple cycles in an attempt to succeed. By preventing the STDs that contribute to infertility, the economic impact of treating infertility could be significantly reduced.

## **3. Long-term Economic Benefits**

Investing in policies and programs that promote delaying sexual activity until marriage can lead to long-term economic benefits. Reduced healthcare costs and improved health outcomes can result in a healthier and more productive workforce. Additionally, reduced infertility rates can alleviate the financial burden on individuals seeking costly treatments, further supporting economic stability.

## **Conclusion**

Waiting until marriage to engage in sexual activity offers notable benefits in terms of the prevention of STDs and infertility. Public policies that support this approach could lead to improved sexual health outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, and economic savings. Further research into the effectiveness of such policies, alongside enhanced sexual education programs that are focused on relationship skills training, dating strategies, goal setting, character development, and the Success Sequence, can help address the growing concerns surrounding STDs and reproductive health.

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<sup>9</sup> White House (2025). Fact Sheet: President Trump, IVF, October 16, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/10/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-announces-actions-to-lower-costs-and-expand-access-to-in-vitro-fertilization-ivf-and-high-quality-fertility-care/>.

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<sup>3</sup> CDC (2021) Sexually Transmitted Infections Treatment Guidelines, Adolescents,

[https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-](https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/adolescents.htm#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20prevalence,For%20example%2C%20reported%20rates%20of)

[guidelines/adolescents.htm#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20prevalence,For%20example%2C%20reported%20rates%20of](https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/adolescents.htm#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20prevalence,For%20example%2C%20reported%20rates%20of). Last reviewed: July 22, 2021. Accessed: Dec. 17, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> CDC (2023) About Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, <https://www.cdc.gov/pid/about/index.html>. Accessed: Dec. 17, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> CDC (2021) Sexually Transmitted Infections Treatment Guidelines, 2021, Epididymitis,

<https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/epididymitis.htm>. Accessed: Dec. 17, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Greydanus, D. E., & Bacopoulou, F. (2019). Acute pelvic inflammatory disease: A narrative review. *Pediatric Medicine*, 2, <https://pm.amegroups.org/article/view/4950/html#B1>; Kreisel, K., Torrone, E., Bernstein, K., Hong, J., & Gorwitz, R. (2017). Prevalence of Pelvic Inflammatory Disease in Sexually Experienced Women of Reproductive Age - United States, 2013-2014. *MMWR. Morbidity and mortality weekly report*, 66(3), 80–83. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6603a3>

<sup>7</sup> Caplan (2021). What Does the Success Sequence Mean? *IFS Studies*, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/what-does-the-success-sequence-mean>.

<sup>8</sup> Chesson et al. (2021). The Estimated Direct Lifetime Medical Costs of Sexually Transmitted Infections Acquired in the United States in 2018. *Sexually transmitted diseases*, 48(4), 215–221. See also:

<https://doi.org/10.1097/OLQ.0000000000001380>; <https://www.cdc.gov/sti/php/communication-resources/prevalence-incidence-and-cost-estimates.html>.

<sup>9</sup> White House (2025). Fact Sheet: President Trump, IVF, October 16, 2025,

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/10/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-announces-actions-to-lower-costs-and-expand-access-to-in-vitro-fertilization-ivf-and-high-quality-fertility-care/>.