

### PRESCRIBED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Demonstrate an understanding of the consequences of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (e.g. symptoms, short-term and long-term health issues)

### Timing

75 minutes

### Objectives

- Identify common STIs
- Demonstrate how bacteria and viruses are transmitted during sex
- Emphasize the importance of STI testing

### Assessment

Student will be able to:

1. List at least four common sexually transmitted infections
2. Identify the two possible ways to transmit an STI
3. Articulate the need for regular STI testing
4. Locate a local sexual health clinic for testing and support

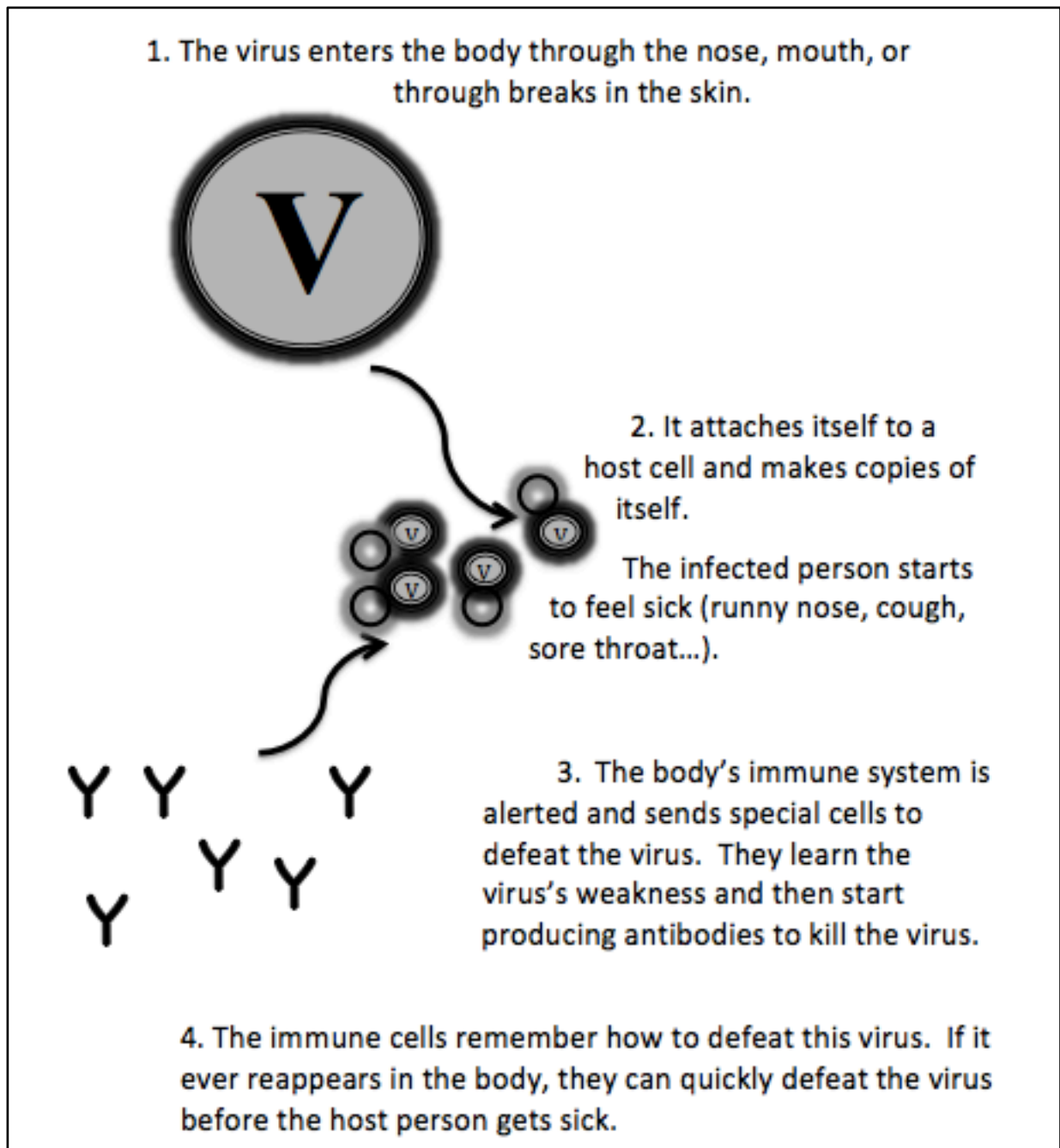
### Procedure

#### ACTIVITY 1: HOW BACTERIA AND VIRUSES ARE TRANSMITTED (20 MIN)

Ask students to raise their hand if they have had a cough, cold, or flu in the last year. Inform the class that a *virus* causes all of these illnesses. Viruses are transmitted from person-to-person, often through very casual contact (breathing in virus particles after someone sneezes or coughs, ingesting virus particles from our hands when we eat, sharing a drink or food, etc.). Humans live in groups or societies, and viruses and bacteria can be passed quite easily between folks who are in close proximity—this is simply part of the human experience.

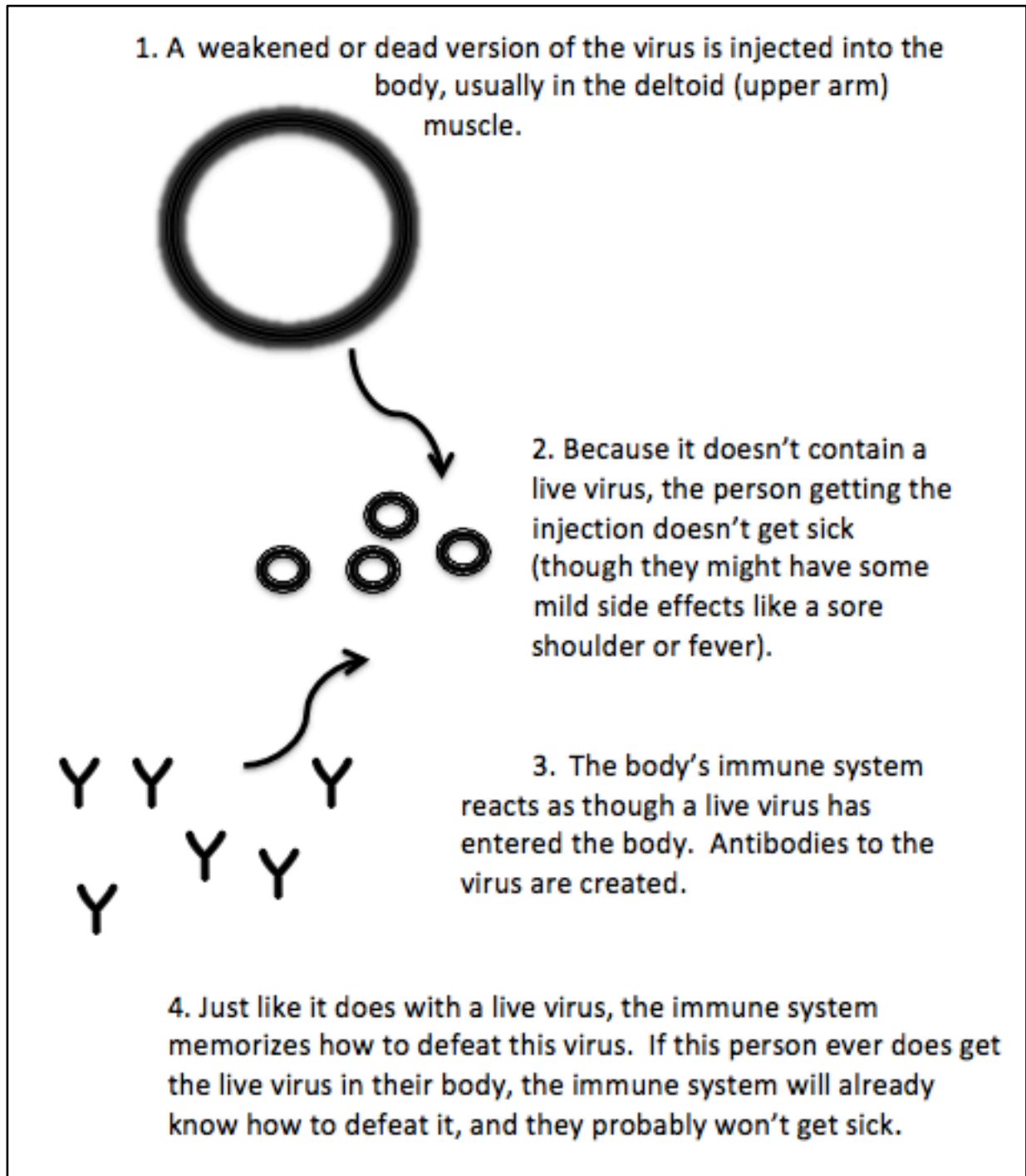
When a virus enters our body, the immune system launches a series of offensives designed to destroy this intruder. Often, we aren't even aware that this is happening—at any given time, people may be fighting up to 2000 viruses and feel perfectly fine. The immune system is a marvelous thing! If a virus does manage to live and start replicating in our body, an *immune response* is triggered and our body will try to flush out the virus by making our body sneeze, cough, run a fever, etc.

Eventually, our immune system will figure out how to destroy the virus. Once that happens, information about the virus' weaknesses gets recorded or memorized, and shared with all the cells of the immune system. We now have *immunity* to the virus that was just destroyed. If we ever come in contact with the same virus, we will not get sick because we are immune to its effects.



Sometimes we can also be immune to a virus by getting vaccinated. Scientists inject a hollow or inert virus into the body that cannot make us sick. The immune system is tricked into thinking that the virus is dangerous, and

will launch an attack, learn to defeat it, share that information with the rest of the immune system, and that body will now be immune to the virus as though they had been sick and recovered.



Note for the class that when we are sick with a cold or flu, our friends and loved ones are usually sympathetic. We take time off from school or work to recover; we might spend time resting, taking medication, drinking lots of fluids, etc. People will often ask us if we're feeling better, or if there's anything we need. Rarely (if ever) do people tell us that we deserve to be sick, or that we must have done something bad in order to fall ill, and certainly no one tells us that we are immoral or disgusting when we catch a cold.

Sexually transmitted infections (or STIs) are viruses and bacteria that can be passed or transmitted during sexual contact. Even though STIs are much like the viruses humans get in their day-to-day lives, because they're associated with sex we often think of STIs in a more negative way. Shame and stigma can prevent people from taking important steps, like getting tested, getting treated, asking partners to practice safer sex, or disclosing their status to new partners.

## ACTIVITY 2: HOW ARE STIs TRANSMITTED? (15 MIN)

STIs are passed during intimate or sexual contact, when one partner is infected with a virus. STIs are transmitted through certain *fluids* and through *skin-to-skin contact*.

**BRAINSTORM:** Ask students to list every bodily fluid they can think of! Suggestions might include:

- Tears
- Sweat
- Blood
- Urine
- Semen
- Saliva

Encourage them to list every fluid they know. You will likely have to add one fluid to the final list: *vaginal fluid*. Once the list has been populated, cross out all except:

1. Blood
2. Semen
3. Vaginal fluid

These are the three fluids that can carry enough quantity of an STI to transmit that infection to a partner. When these fluids come in contact with each other, transmission is possible.

Some STIs can be transmitted when certain skin types come in contact with each other. Those skin types are:

1. Mouth
2. Genitals
3. Rectum

What can folks use during sex to keep these fluids from mixing, and these skins from touching? Use a *barrier method*, like a *condom*. Condoms offer excellent protection against STI transmission because they keep fluid out of partners' bodies, and keep vulnerable skin from contacting other skin.

### ACTIVITY 3: WHAT ARE SOME COMMON STIs? (20 MIN)

Ask students to list every STI they know. Write their suggestions on the board, and arrange the list in two columns, like this:

Chlamydia	Herpes
Gonorrhea	HIV
Syphilis	Hepatitis B
Pubic Lice (crabs)	HPV

Ask students what the STIs on the right have in common—they all begin with the letter ‘H’. These are the viruses. The list on the left is bacterial infections (though technically, pubic lice is an *infestation*).

Briefly characterize each STI, listing some important or interesting information. Some examples:

- Chlamydia and gonorrhea are very common infections, especially among youth. Symptoms are very rare—most people feel quite healthy and have no idea that they are infected. Even if the infection isn’t bothering them, it’s very important for someone to know if they have chlamydia or gonorrhea. If the infection isn’t treated it will progress and can cause scarring in the reproductive systems. Scientists believe that as much as 30% of infertility in adults is caused by an undiagnosed chlamydia or gonorrhea infection when that person was younger.
- Syphilis was once a deadly infection, but it is now quite curable with one injection of antibiotics. Though syphilis was all but wiped out a decade ago, it is becoming quite common again. Scientists worry that people will be fooled by this bacteria’s mild symptoms like a rash on the palms of the hands or belly. If left untreated, it can cause serious damage to internal organs.
- Pubic lice is rarely unnoticed—it’s super itchy! When someone has pubic lice they buy a special shampoo and use a special comb to rid themselves of this infestation.
- Herpes is an extremely common virus, and most people have come in contact with it. Though it’s classified as an STI, it is easily passed through very casual contact: a quick kiss on the cheek, sharing a drink or cigarette, etc. Herpes is a benign skin condition that can cause distress during outbreaks, but is not harmful to people’s health. There are excellent treatments for people who get frequent outbreaks around their mouth or genitals, but there are no ‘cures’ for herpes.

- HIV is the *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*, and people usually have a lot of anxiety about this STI. It's very serious when someone acquires this infection, and it's important that they know they're infected so they can begin the treatment that will keep the virus in check. If untreated, this virus can weaken the immune system. When this happens, the person can get very sick from a simple cough or cold. If they develop a number of *opportunistic infections*, a doctor will say that they have a syndrome called AIDS—the acquired immune deficiency syndrome. HIV can also be transmitted if people share the needles they use to inject drugs (like heroin, or steroids).
- Hepatitis B causes an infection of the liver, but the good news about this virus is you are probably immune to it. Most people who live in Canada have been vaccinated against Hep B. That means if they ever have unprotected sex with someone who is infected, they won't get Hep B because they're immune. If you haven't been vaccinated, or don't know whether or not you've been vaccinated, you can get the vaccine for free at a public health unit.
- The human papilloma virus, or HPV, is a very common virus. Almost everyone comes into contact with this virus and doesn't get sick. Of the hundreds of possible strains, two of them (HPV 16 and HPV 18) are known to cause cervical cancer in women, and head or neck cancers in men. Luckily there is a very effective vaccine available free for females in Grade 6 or Grade 9. Males can also be vaccinated, though it's expensive to purchase. Most extended medical plans will cover the vaccine for male patients.

Note for educator: Focus on modeling a sex positive and shame-free perspective, and spend little if any time attempting to describe symptoms (and certainly don't show photos of infections). If students ask for detailed symptoms, repeat that the most common experience is to have no apparent symptoms, but some people might notice a rash or bumps around their genitals, feel pain when they pee, or have unusual discharge from their penis or vagina.

#### **ACTIVITY 4: HOW AND WHERE ARE STIs DIAGNOSED AND TREATED? (20 MINS)**

Because of the stigma surrounding STIs, and because symptoms are rare, many people aren't aware that they are infected. Left untreated, many sexually transmitted infections can have long-term health consequences. People can also be infecting their partners without realizing it!

The simple principle to follow is:

### **Sexually active? Get tested regularly.**

STI tests are quick and easy, and usually involve a urine sample and/or a blood test. If a patient is found to have an STI, they can be treated at the same clinic. Many STIs can be treated quickly and effectively with a dose of antibiotics. Other STIs can be managed effectively with medication.

Instruct students to research where they can get STI tests in their community. This information can be found through web searches, by calling the 1-877 YK STYLE line, or by asking peers, school counselors, etc. Compile a list of youth-friendly options, and ask students to record the clinic's hours of operation and address.

## Closing

Restate the importance of regular testing once people are sexually active. Welcome questions, and thank students for participation. Review school, community and web resources and hand out 1-877 YK STYLE cards.

## Materials

Yukon Sexual Health Clinic pamphlets

1-877 YK STYLE cards