

# Sexually Transmitted Diseases

## What are sexually transmitted diseases?

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infections that are passed from one person to another by sexual contact. Sexual contact includes vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, oral-genital contact, skin-to-skin contact in the genital area, kissing, and the use of sex toys, such as vibrators. The diseases usually affect the genital area, for example, the penis or vagina.

Examples of STDs are:

- syphilis
- gonorrhea
- chlamydia
- herpes
- human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes genital warts
- hepatitis B or C
- trichomoniasis
- HIV/AIDS.

Key facts about STDs are:

- STDs affect men and women of all backgrounds and economic levels. They are most common in people younger than 25 years of age.
- The number of people affected by STDs is rising. Sexually active people today are more likely to have many sex partners during their lives, putting them at a higher risk for STDs.
- STDs may not cause symptoms. A person who is infected may not know it and may give the infection to a sex partner.
- STDs cause more severe health problems for women, such as death from a tubal pregnancy and cancer of the cervix.
- STDs can spread from a pregnant mother to her newborn baby and cause serious problems or death.

## How do they occur?

Bacteria, viruses, and parasites cause STDs. They are usually passed between partners during sexual intercourse and other sexual contact. You can have an STD without knowing it. This means that you could infect your partner before you know you have an STD.

## What are the symptoms?

Some possible symptoms of STDs are:

- burning or pain when urinating
- unusual discharge from the vagina or penis

- itching, burning, or pain around the vagina, penis, or rectum
- rashes, sores, blisters, or growths around the vagina, penis, or rectum
- sore throat
- vaginal bleeding between menstrual periods.

## **How are they diagnosed?**

Depending on the type of infection, the diagnosis may be made from your symptoms, an exam, and possibly lab tests.

## **How are they treated?**

Many STDs can be cured with antibiotic medicines, especially when they are diagnosed and treated early. Some STDs caused by viruses, such as herpes, HIV, and genital warts, have no cure, but treatments are available to lessen or avoid complications. If you cannot afford to pay for treatment, most communities have an STD clinic or county health department where visits are free of charge or cost a very small amount.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

Do not be embarrassed or afraid to seek care or ask for information. STD checks are a part of routine care at most medical offices and clinics. Remember that early diagnosis and treatment can prevent complications and keep you from spreading the disease to your partner. You can get more information and treatment from your healthcare provider, the health department, a family planning clinic, or an STD clinic. Make sure that you carefully follow your provider's treatment plan.

## **How can I help prevent STDs?**

The best way to prevent STDs is to avoid sexual contact. This includes not having vaginal sex, anal sex, or oral sex. If you are sexually active, here are some steps you should take to reduce your risk of becoming infected with a STD:

- Delay having sexual relations as long as possible. The younger you are when you begin having sex, the more likely it is that you will develop an STD.
- Have just 1 sexual partner who you know does not have an infection and is not sexually active with anyone else.
- Practice safe sex. Always use latex or polyurethane condoms during any sexual contact. Using condoms reduces the risk of infection for some STDs but does not provide full protection against genital warts, syphilis, and herpes. Do not reuse condoms.

If you are sexually active, have regular checkups for STDs, especially if you are having sex with a new partner. If you think you might have an STD or may have been exposed to an STD, stop sexual activity and get a medical exam.

For more information about STDs, call the 24-hour Centers for Disease Control and Prevention STD Hotline at 800-227-8922. Information can also be obtained from their Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

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