

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

By Karen Ashby, M.D., who is an obstetrician and gynecologist at the University Hospitals of Cleveland.

Sexually transmitted diseases or STDs can affect women and men of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Most STDs occur in young people between the ages of 19 and 25 years. STDs can occur in any age group and any sexually active person may acquire an infection. STDs can cause a wide range of health problems ranging from an uncomplicated vaginal infection to life threatening disease. The most common STDs are gonorrhea, chlamydia and human papilloma Virus (HPV). Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which destroys the body's immune system, is currently the most deadly STD. This is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.) While treatment of HIV has improved and infected individuals live longer, there is no cure. In addition to sexual intercourse, many STDs such as HIV and hepatitis may also be transmitted through sharing needles. Pregnant women with STDs may pass their infections to their infant through breast milk or at the time of delivery from the birth canal.

In women, sexually transmitted diseases are particularly dangerous because women often have few symptoms. Infertility, chronic pelvic pain and cervical cancer are all potential long-term effects of untreated or late treatment of chlamydia and gonorrhea. Infected men often have not symptoms and may unknowingly pass infections to their partner.

Preventing STDs is best accomplished by properly and consistently using male condoms. Condom use is not one hundred percent effective but can significantly reduce transmission. Additionally, intravenous drug users should not reuse or share needles. The risk of contacting any STD increases with the number of partners.

One of the most effective methods of preventing the spread of STDs is regular screening. For women, a cervical culture can be done easily with an annual Pap test. For women and men, HIV, hepatitis and syphilis can be detected by blood tests. Educating oneself about symptoms of STDs is also an important way of preventing the potential complications so that prompt medical care can be given. Practices such as douching should be avoided because normal vaginal bacteria protect against STDs. Douching may disrupt these bacteria and allow infections to be more easily transmitted.

If you are diagnosed with an STD, you should avoid sexual contact until you are completely treated. One of the most difficult but most important parts of STD prevention is making certain that all your sexual contacts are notified that you have an STD so that they may be promptly treated.

Common Sexually Transmitted Diseases

| Infection | Cause | Symptoms | Treatment or cure |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Trichomonas | Trichomonas | Foul smelling | Antibiotics |

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| | vaginalis | vaginal discharge | |
| Chlamydia | Chlamydia trachomatis | None, vaginal discharge, pelvic pain | Antibiotics |
| Gonorrhea | Neisseria gonorrhoea | None, vaginal discharge, pelvic pain | Antibiotics |
| HPV (human papilloma virus) | HPV | None, vaginal itching, abnormal PAP smear | Removal with medications or surgery, observation, there is no cure |
| HSV (herpes simplex virus) | Herpes simplex virus | Vaginal burning and/or painful sores | Antiviral do not cure but can shorten symptoms |
| HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) | HIV | None in early stages | Antiretrovirals do not cure |
| Syphilis | Treponema pallidum | Painless ulcer, rash or neurological problems | Penicillin |