

Facts about Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

- STDs are also called **venereal diseases**. You could get STDs by having sex (vaginal, oral, or anal) with someone who already has an STD. So STDs affect men and women of all races, rich and poor. However, women, young people, and people of color are more likely to get an STD.
- STDs are caused by **bacteria, viruses, or parasites**.
- Some STDs can be cured, but others can't.
- STDs may affect your health and quality of life.
- Having an STD may put you at risk for getting another STD such as **HIV**, the virus that causes AIDS.



What happens to me if I get an STD?

- You may not feel sick. Sometimes, even when you feel sick, you might think you have another disease, when really you're sick because of an STD.
- In **women**, STDs are more easily received, more often asymptomatic (you may not feel sick even though you have an STD), and often have more serious consequences (such as causing cervical cancer) if untreated.
- If diagnosed and treated early, most STDs get better and go away. **That's why it's important to get tested, even if you don't feel sick!**

About HIV and AIDS

- AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which destroys the body's ability to fight off infection.
- You could get HIV by having sex and/or by sharing needles used for intravenous drugs.
- There is no cure for HIV/AIDS, but there are treatments to control it.

About Chlamydia

- In men and women, chlamydia can cause an abnormal genital discharge and burning feeling when urinating.
- In women, if untreated, it can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which could lead to infertility.
- Many people with chlamydia have few or no symptoms.
- It can be cured with antibiotics.

About Genital Herpes

Herpes infection causes painful sores in the genital area. The herpes sores go away in two to three weeks, but the virus stays in the body for life, and the sores may come back.

- You can treat herpes with antiviral medicine. This medicine helps control the symptoms but does not get rid of the herpes virus.
- If you are pregnant and have genital herpes, you could pass it on to your baby.

- Untreated infection in newborns could cause mental retardation and death.

About Genital Warts

- Genital warts are small, hard, painless bumps in the vagina, on the penis, or around the anus. If untreated, they may grow and look like cauliflower.
- Genital warts may cause cervical cancer and other genital cancers.
- Genital warts can be treated with medicine that you apply on your skin; with freezing; or, if they return after treatment, with injections. If the warts are large, they can be removed by surgery.

About Gonorrhea

- In men and women, gonorrhea may cause an abnormal genital discharge and painful or difficult urination.
- The most common complications, such as PID, ectopic pregnancy (in which a fetus starts growing in the Fallopian tubes), and infertility, happen with women.
- Penicillin is used to treat gonorrhea.

About Syphilis

- The first symptom is a painless open sore on the penis or around the vagina, mouth, anus, or hand. The sore usually goes away by itself.
- If you do not treat syphilis, it can get worse, infecting your heart and central nervous system. It might also reappear as a rash.
- Penicillin is used to treat syphilis.

What Can I Do to Prevent STDs?

The only way to prevent STDs is not to have sex. If you decide to have sex, there are things that you can do to lower your risk of getting an STD.

- Have sex with only one partner, who does not have an STD. The more sexual partners you have, the more likely you are to get an STD.
- Always use a condom, and use a new one every time you have sex.
- Use clean needles if injecting intravenous drugs.
- If you are a teenager, you should wait until you are older before having sex. The younger you are, the more likely you are to get an STD if you have sex.
- Get regular checkups for STDs, even if you do not have symptoms, and especially if having sex with a new partner.
- Learn what the symptoms of STDs are. See your doctor if you have any symptoms.
- Avoid anal sex, but if you do have anal sex, use a male condom.
- Try not to douche because it takes away some of the normal bacteria that protects your vagina, and increases your risk of getting STDs.

What If I Have an STD?

- Get treated as soon as possible to lower the risk of passing it to others and your baby (if you are pregnant).
- Tell all your recent sex partners, and urge them to get tested for STDs.
- Take all medications you were given. Most STDs are easy to treat.
- Do not have sex while being treated for an STD.

REMEMBER:

It is up to you to learn more about STDs. Then, you can make choices about ways to lower your risk of getting an STD and spreading it to others.

If you have any questions about STDs, call:

CDC National AIDS Hotline
1-800-342-AIDS

CDC National STD Hotline
1-800-227-8922

MetroPlus Care Management Line
1-800-579-9798

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for medical care and advice of your doctor. There may be variations in treatment that your doctor may recommend based on individual facts about you.

Source: Office of Women's Health in the Department of Health and Human Services

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1-800-475-METRO

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