

Protect Yourself & the People You Love from Common STDs



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There are a lot of things you can get out of an intimate relationship – human connection, understanding, love. But one thing you don't want to get is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). STDs are caused by infections passed from one person to another through sexual contact and can be passed through oral, vaginal or anal sex. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 19 million new STD infections occur each year in the United States – almost half of them among young people 15-24 years of age. In addition to youth, women and minorities are also severely affected. STDs are the most commonly reported infectious diseases in the United States. Chlamydia and gonorrhea are the most common reportable STDs and can result in infertility in women.

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is caused by the bacteria, *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Chlamydia is known as a "silent" disease because about three quarters of infected women and about half of infected men have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1 to 3 weeks after exposure. Women who have symptoms might have an abnormal vaginal discharge or a burning sensation when urinating. Men with signs or symptoms might have a discharge from their penis or a burning sensation when urinating. If untreated, chlamydial infections can progress to serious reproductive and other health problems with both short-term and long-term consequences. In women, untreated infection can spread into the uterus or fallopian tubes and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which happens in up to 40 percent of women with untreated chlamydia.

Complications among men are rare. Chlamydia can be easily treated and cured with antibiotics. A single dose of azithromycin or a week of doxycycline (twice daily) are the most commonly used treatments.

Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, a bacteria that can grow and multiply easily in the warm, moist areas of the reproductive tract, including the cervix, uterus, and fallopian tubes in women, and in the urethra in women and men. The bacterium can also grow in the mouth, throat, eyes, and anus. Ejaculation does not have to occur for gonorrhea to be transmitted or acquired. Symptoms and signs, which can take anywhere from two to 30 days to appear, include a burning sensation when urinating, or a white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis. Sometimes men with gonorrhea get painful or swollen testicles. In women, the symptoms of gonorrhea are often mild, but most women who are infected have no symptoms. Several antibiotics can successfully cure gonorrhea in adolescents and adults. However, drug-resistant strains of gonorrhea are increasing in many areas of the world, including the United States, and successful treatment of gonorrhea is becoming more difficult. Because many people with gonorrhea also have chlamydia, antibiotics for both infections are usually given together.

Preventing STD Infections

STD Screening

- CDC recommends annual Chlamydia screening for all sexually active women under age 26, as well as older women with risk factors such as new or multiple sex partners
- CDC also supports U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommendations to screen high risk, sexually active women for gonorrhea

Immunization

- Vaccines are available for the prevention of two commonly sexually transmitted viral infections: hepatitis B and several common strains of human papillomavirus (HPV)

Abstinence and Reduction of Number of Sex Partners

- The most reliable ways to avoid infection with an STD are to abstain from sex (i.e. oral, vaginal or anal sex) or to be in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner.

Correct and Consistent Use of Condoms

- Consistent and correct use of the male latex condom reduces the risk of STD infection.

For more information on STDs, please visit the web site at www.cdc.gov/std or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.