



Sexually Transmitted Diseases Pose Severe Threat to Women's Health and Fertility

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are among the most serious preventable threats to women's fertility in the United States. Biological factors place women at greater risk than men for the most severe health consequences of the two most commonly reported STDs, chlamydia and gonorrhea.

These diseases are often asymptomatic and, left untreated, 10 to 20 percent of chlamydia or gonorrhea infections in women can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) — an infection in the uterus, fallopian tubes and other reproductive organs that can permanently damage reproductive organs. PID symptoms are often mild, so many cases are undiagnosed and untreated. Even with subtle symptoms, repeated episodes of PID can cause ectopic pregnancy and infertility. CDC estimates that undiagnosed and untreated STDs cause at least 24,000 women in the United States each year to become infertile. Teenage girls between ages 15 – 19 have the highest reported cases of chlamydia, followed closely by young women between ages 20 – 24. CDC recommends annual chlamydia screening for all sexually active women under age 26, yet more than half of women under age 26 are not screened.

Despite substantial progress preventing, diagnosing, and treating STDs, CDC estimates that approximately half of new gonorrhea and more than half of new chlamydia infections that occur each year remain undiagnosed and unreported, even though both STDs are easily diagnosed and treated.

Chlamydia

- ▶ CDC estimates that a total of 2.8 million new infections occur each year in the U.S.
- ▶ More than 1.2 million cases were reported in 2008 (less than half of the actual estimated number of infections) — routine screening is critical to reducing infections
- ▶ The highest numbers of infection are among teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (342,875 cases) followed by women ages 20 – 24 (323,696 cases)
- ▶ The rate of reported infections among black females is almost eight times that of white females and almost three times that of Hispanic females

Gonorrhea

- ▶ Gonorrhea remains the second most commonly reported infectious disease in the U.S.
- ▶ A total of almost 337,000 cases were reported in 2008 (half of the actual estimated number of infections)
- ▶ The highest numbers of infection are among teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (66,656 cases) followed by women ages 20 – 24 (61,951 cases)
- ▶ Gonorrhea rates are highest among young black women 15 – 19 and 20 – 24 years of age (2,934.6 and 2,777.0 per 100,000 respectively)

For more information or to interview an STD expert, contact CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB prevention at (404) 639-8895.

Preventing STD Infection

There are many actions individuals can take to protect themselves from STDs and their most severe consequences:

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.

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.

More information about STDs is available at www.cdc.gov/std