How do people get trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis is caused by the single-celled protozoan parasite, Trichomonas vaginalis. The vagina is the most common site of infection in women, and the urethra (urine canal) is the most common site of infection in men. The parasite is sexually transmitted through penis-to-vagina intercourse or vulva-to-vulva (the genital area outside the vagina) contact with an infected partner. Women can acquire the disease from infected men or women, but men usually contract it only from infected women.

What is trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) that affects both women and men, although symptoms are more common in women.

How common is trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis is the most common curable STD in young, sexually active women. An estimated 7.4 million new cases occur each year in women and men.

What are the signs and symptoms of trichomoniasis?

Most men with trichomoniasis do not have signs or symptoms; however, some men may temporarily have an irritation inside the penis, mild discharge, or slight burning after urination or ejaculation.

Some women have signs or symptoms of infection which include a frothy, yellow-green vaginal discharge with a strong odor. The infection also may cause discomfort during intercourse and urination, as well as irritation and itching of the female genital area. In rare cases, lower abdominal pain can occur. Symptoms usually appear in women within 5 to 28 days of exposure.

What is the treatment for trichomoniasis?

Trichomoniasis can usually be cured with the prescription drug, metronidazole, given by mouth in a single dose. The symptoms of trichomoniasis in infected men may disappear within a few weeks without treatment. However, an infected man, even a man who has never had symptoms or whose symptoms have stopped, can continue to infect or re-infect a female partner until he has been treated. Therefore, both partners should be treated at the same time to eliminate the parasite. Persons being treated for trichomoniasis should avoid sex until they and their sex partners complete treatment and have no symptoms. Metronidazole can be used by pregnant women.

Having trichomoniasis once does not protect a person from getting it again. Following successful treatment, people can still be susceptible to re-infection.

How is trichomoniasis diagnosed?

For both men and women, a health care provider must perform a physical examination and laboratory test to diagnose trichomoniasis. The parasite is harder to detect in men than in women. In women, a pelvic examination can reveal small red ulcerations (sores) on the vaginal wall or cervix.

How does trichomoniasis affect a pregnant woman and her baby?

Pregnant women with trichomoniasis may have babies who are born early or with low birth weight (less than five pounds).

How can trichomoniasis be prevented?

The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual contact, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected.

Latex male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of trichomoniasis.

Any genital symptom such as discharge or burning during urination or an unusual sore or rash should be a signal to stop having sex and to consult a health care provider immediately. A person diagnosed with trichomoniasis (or any other STD) should receive treatment and should notify all recent sex partners so that they can see a health care provider and be treated. This reduces the risk that the sex partners will develop complications from trichomoniasis and reduces the risk that the person with trichomoniasis will become re-infected. Sex should be stopped until the person with trichomoniasis and all of his or her recent partners complete treatment for trichomoniasis and have no symptoms.

What are the complications of trichomoniasis?

The genital inflammation caused by trichomoniasis can increase a woman's susceptibility to HIV infection if she is exposed to the virus. Having trichomoniasis may increase the chance that an HIV-infected woman passes HIV to her sex partner(s).

Where can I get more information?

Division of STD Prevention (DSTDP)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/std

Personal health inquiries and information about STDs:

CDC National STD and AIDS Hotlines
(800) 227-8922 or (800) 342-2437
En Espanol (800) 344-7432
TTY for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (800) 243-7889

National Herpes Hotline
(919) 361-8488

National Herpes Resource Center
http://www.ashastd.org/hrc
herpesnet@ashastd.org

Resources:

CDC National Prevention Information Network (NPIN)
P.O. Box 6003
Rockville, MD 20849-6003
1-800-458-5231
1-888-282-7681 Fax
1-800-243-7012 TTY
E-mail: info@cdcnpin.org
http://www.cdcnpin.org

American Social Health Association (ASHA)
P. O. Box 13827
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-3827
1-800-783-9877
http://www.ashastd.org
STD questions: std-hivnet@ashastd.org

Printable versions of this and other STD fact sheets are available at:
http://www.cdc.gov/std/healthcomm/fact_sheets.htm

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