

Sexually Transmitted Infections

What are Sexually Transmitted Infections

- Sexually Transmitted Infections, or STIs, were once called Sexually Transmitted Diseases or STDs. They are defined as any infection that can be spread through the body during anal, oral or vaginal sex with an infected person.
- STIs can also be transmitted to the eye by a hand or other body part dampened with infected body fluids.
- There are two kinds of STIs:
 - Bacterial Infections– treatable with antibiotics, though damage can be permanent (ex. Gonorrhea, Syphilis, Chlamydia)
 - Viral Infections– treatment is available to help control symptoms, but there is no cure (ex. Herpes, HIV, Hepatitis B, and Genital Warts)

How to Avoid STIs

- Practice abstinence (not having sex at all.)
- Always use a condom when engaging in anal, oral or vaginal sex. But remember, condoms can only reduce your exposure to STIs; they do not provide guaranteed protection.
- Choose your partner carefully. A mutually monogamous (only having sex with each other) relationship decreases the risk of contracting an STI.
- Have your partner tested before having sex.

STIs in the Long Term

- Can make it more difficult for you to become pregnant in the future
- Can cause stillbirth, low birth weight, neurological damage or infections in a baby's bloodstream
- Can cause on-going health problems and in some cases even cancer

Treatment

- If you think you may have contracted an STI, see your health care provider to get tested and start treatment.
- After treatment, get the approval of your health care provider before having sex again.

HIV

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) attacks the body's immune system, weakening the body's ability to fight off disease and infection. When this happens, a person's white blood cell count decreases, which makes them unable to fight off even common illnesses and can therefore become deadly. With time, HIV usually progresses into AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) making it the most dangerous STI.

How is it spread?

Through vaginal, anal or oral sex, contact with bodily fluids (blood, saliva, semen, vaginal secretions or breast milk), sharing needles, pricks with infected needles, blood transfusions (rarely in America), childbirth and breastfeeding.

Symptoms and Diagnosis

HIV doesn't always show symptoms, or symptoms won't show up until months or years after infection. So being tested by a medical professional is the best way to catch HIV.

Since it can take more than 3 months for the HIV antibodies to show up in blood tests, it's important to always repeat the test a few months after a negative result.

Treatment

Although HIV cannot be cured, it can be treated with a combination of drugs that can prevent the virus from progressing into AIDS.

How to protect yourself from HIV

- ALWAYS use condoms for vaginal, anal and oral sex.
- Decrease your number of sexual partners
- Avoid high-risk sexual practices like anal sex, oral-anal sex or unprotected sex.
- Don't share needles with others and avoid having sex with people who use drugs that require needle usage.
- Don't allow urine to come into contact with your mouth, anus, eyes or open cuts.
- Have annual or semi-annual HIV tests, and encourage your partner(s) to do the same.

Types of Infections

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI/Bladder Infection)

- A bladder infection is an irritation of the urinary tract, which causes burning and frequent urination. If untreated, a UTI can lead to a more serious kidney infection.

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

- BV is an infection of the vagina that is most often caused by an overgrowth of bacteria that are normally found in the vagina.
- Women who douche tend to get more BV infections than women who do not.
- If untreated, BV can lead to inflammation of the cervix, uterus and pelvic inflammatory disease.

Toxoplasmosis, Herpes, HIV

- These infections affect fetuses and newborns and are caused by several different viruses of the same names and Syphilis. There are treatment options, but no cure.
- HIV testing is recommended for all pregnant women. Treating an HIV positive mother reduces the chance of transmitting the infection on to the baby.

Group B Strep

- Bacteria often found in the vagina that has no symptoms, but can make newborns very ill.
- Cultures should be done during pregnancy to screen for Group B Strep.

Chlamydia

- The most frequently reported bacterial STI in the U.S., particularly among teens.
- Infects the vagina, cervix, fallopian tubes, anus, urethra or eye.
- Rarely shows symptoms, though it is curable with antibiotics.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

- Can cause genital warts and cancer.
- Does not usually have symptoms so the best way to catch it is with a Pap smear.
- Preventable by getting a vaccine called Gardasil.

Gonorrhea

- An infected mother can pass the infection on to the baby's eyes at birth and cause a serious eye infection.
- Can cause permanent damage to reproductive organs if left untreated.

Yeast Infection

- A common condition that causes itching, white, curd-like discharge, red, irritated skin around the vagina, pain while urinating and pain during intercourse.
- Treatable with over the counter medications, but frequent cases should consult a physician.