

## Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), also known as sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), are commonly transmitted between partners through some form of sexual activity. STDs were generally referred to as venereal diseases (VD) until some time around 1990, when public health officials introduced the new term in an effort to improve the clarity of their warnings to the public.\*

Most STDs are curable. However, there are some that are not. You can become infected if you have sex with someone who has an STD. You cannot tell if a person has an STD by looking at them. They may look healthy with no outward signs. They may not even know they are infected. There are others that will not tell you they have an STD, even if they know. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 25 known diseases are spread primarily through sexual activity.

If left undiagnosed and untreated, STDs can cause serious complications and often long-term effects for both males and females. It is possible to get an STD without having sexual intercourse (vaginal penetration). You can also contract an STD if you engage in oral or anal sex. The best way to protect yourself against STDs is abstinence -- not having vaginal, oral or anal sex.

If you think you may have an STD, it is important that you take action. Don't let it go untreated.

- Talk to your mom or dad, or another adult you trust,
- Talk to your school nurse, or
- Call your family doctor or your local county health department.

Below are some of the most common STDs among teenagers and adults in the United States. Click on the link for specific information on the STD.

## HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

**The breakdown** Individuals infected with an STD are two to five times more likely to acquire HIV than uninfected individuals. HIV can be contracted through sexual activity with an infected person or through dirty needles infected with drug use.

**Word on the street** The virus attacks your immune fighting cells (T4 cells). By damaging these cells, a person is less likely to ward off diseases and is less likely to maintain a constant state of health. The later stage of HIV is AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). The AIDS stage occurs gradually and development can vary from individual to individual.

**Street name** the new epidemic, the deadly disease

**Symptoms** Neither HIV nor AIDS has a characteristic set of symptoms to look for if you think you may be infected. Some people do not notice any symptoms until a few weeks, months or even years after being infected. However, some people report having flu-like symptoms, which may include headache, nausea, exhaustion, fever and swollen lymph nodes (found in your neck, armpits and groin) within three to six weeks.

**Can it be cured?** The truth is there is no known cure for HIV/AIDS. However, doctors and researchers are working on finding treatments, drugs and vaccines to help fight the virus.

## PID - Pelvic Inflammatory Disease

**The breakdown** A general term that refers to the infection of the uterus (womb), fallopian tubes and other reproductive organs. It is a common and serious complication of some STDS including chlamydia and gonorrhea. The more sexual partners a girl has the more likely she is to contract PID.

**Word on the street** This disease affects women and is often a result of gonorrhea or chlamydia. It can lead to infertility, recurring infections and chronic pelvis pain. A prior appearance of PID increases the risk of another appearance because the reproductive organs may be damaged during the initial infection.

**Street name** PID

**Symptoms** Vary from none to severe. Because of vague symptoms PID can go unrecognized by women. Most common symptoms include lower abdominal pain, fever, unusual vaginal discharge with foul odor, painful urination, irregular menstrual bleeding and painful intercourse.

**Can it be cured?** While PID can be treated and cured, it is important to realize that some effects, such as infertility, may become permanent.

## BV - Bacterial Vaginosis

**The breakdown** It is of the most common forms of vaginal infections. Many individuals who contract BV have no symptoms.

**Word on the street** This infection can cause a strong "fishy smell."

**Street name** BV

**Symptoms** Often, there are no symptoms. However, symptoms in women may include an unpleasant vaginal odor, a white or gray vaginal discharge, burning during urination, and itching around the outside of the vagina.

**Can it be cured?** If the infection is not treated, the bacteria may get up into the uterus or the fallopian tubes and cause more serious infections. Treating bacterial vaginosis lowers this risk. Treatment is especially important in pregnant women. BV can increase a woman's susceptibility to other STDs, such as chlamydia and gonorrhea.

## Chlamydia (kla-mid-e-ah)

**The breakdown** It is the most frequently reported STD in the U.S. It can be transmitted through any form of sexual intercourse including vaginal, anal and/or oral sex. The more sexual partners one may have the greater one's risk of contracting this disease. Chlamydia may also appear in the throat after having oral sex with an infected person.

**Word on the street** If left untreated serious complications, like infertility and PID in females, may occur. Males are also at risk and may encounter infections and possibly sterility (the inability to father children).

**Street name** The Silent Disease

**Symptoms** Often mild or undetected, which is why it is known as the silent disease. Females may encounter vaginal discharge or burning while urinating. When the infection progresses to the fallopian tube, females may experience abdominal pain, lower back pain, fever or nausea. Males may also experience a discharge from the penis or burning sensation while urinating.

**Can it be cured?** Chlamydia can be treated and cured through the use of antibiotics. However, if left untreated it can cause reoccurrences.

## Genital Herpes

**The breakdown** One out of five adolescents and adults have had genital herpes. There are two types of herpes. Herpes simplex virus 1 (HSV-1) is oral herpes (usually cold sores) and Herpes simplex virus 2 (HSV-2) is genital herpes. HSV-2 is more common in girls than in guys.

**Word on the street** The disease causes small sores that can burst and cause pain, itching and burning. Tender ulcers (sores) can take up to four weeks to heal. Outbreaks may last a few weeks but can reoccur on a regularly. The virus may spread through contact of a sore or even an area where a sore may no longer visible. Genital herpes can also be transmitted if a person who has a cold sore performs oral sex.

**Street name** For HSV-1: Cold Sores and Fever Blisters.

**Symptoms** Flu-like symptoms including fever and swollen glands.

**Can it be cured?** No, the infection stays in your body indefinitely and can be passed from mother to baby during delivery. However, there are medications that help shorten and prevent outbreaks.

## Genital Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) (Human Pa-pil-lo-ma Virus)

**The breakdown** There are over 100 types of HPV (a.k.a Human Papilloma Virus)in the world. There are 30 types that can be transmitted through sexual contact. Genital warts are soft, moist or flesh colored and appear on the outside or inside of the vagina. They may also appear on or around the penis and anus.

**Word on the street** It causes raised bumps or blisters on genitals and can stay in the body and spread to other people. It has been linked to several types of cancer, in particular cervical cancer.

**Street name** Genital Warts

**Symptoms** Symptoms may be painless but uncomfortable because of their size or itching.

**Can it be cured?** No, once infested the virus stays there for life. However. the virus can be treated. Although treatments can get rid of the warts, none get rid of the virus. So, warts can often come back after treatment.

## Trichomoniasis

**The breakdown** A common STD that affects both males and females. However, symptoms are most common in females. It is the most curable STD in young, sexually active women. The vagina is the most common site of infection which is caused by a parasite.

**Word on the street** The disease causes irritation while urinating and a yellow or green vaginal discharge in women.

**Street name** Trich

**Symptoms** Males usually do not have symptoms but may experience irritation while urinating or a slight or mild discharge. Females may encounter a frothy, yellow-green vaginal discharge with a strong odor. It also causes irritation and itching of the vaginal area.

**Can it be cured?** The Trichomoniasis inflammation can increase a woman's susceptibility to the HIV infection, and increases the chance that an HIV-infected woman could pass HIV to her sex partner(s). Trichomoniasis can be treated and cured through medication.

## Gonorrhea (Gone-or-re-ah)

**The breakdown** It's caused by a bacterium that usually grows in warm, moist areas like the uterus (womb) and urethra (urine canal). It is also likely to grow in the throat, mouth and eyes. It is contracted through the penis, vagina, anus or mouth.

**Word on the street** More than 700,000 people get infected with gonorrhea each year. In the U.S. the highest reported rates of infection are among sexually active teenagers, young adults and African Americans.

**Street name** The whites, the drip, the race horse (because it's always running), G.C. and the clap.

**Symptoms** This STD causes a great deal of discomfort in both males and females. Symptoms may include painful burning sensation when urinating, white or yellow discharge, pelvic pain and/or swollen testicles.

**Can it be cured?** Successful treatment is becoming more difficult. But there are antibiotics that can help treat and cure the disease.

## Syphilis

**The breakdown** Syphilis can be passed on to another person from direct contact with a syphilis sore. Sores are usually visible on the external genitals, vagina or rectum. They may also appear on the lips or mouth. It can be passed on through vaginal, anal or oral sex.

**Word on the street** It is often referred to as "the great imitator" because its symptoms are commonly confused with those of other STDs. Most people who transmit the disease do not know they are infected.

**Street name** Syph, Pox or Bad Blood

**Symptoms** Large, hard sores, hair loss and rash can occur.

**Can it be cured?** If detected early enough it can be treated and cured. If left untreated it can lead to heart, brain and other organ damage and possibly death.

## Hepatitis

**The breakdown** There are 3 main types of hepatitis: Type A, B and C which may all be passed on through sexual intercourse. Some common symptoms for the three types may include yellow eyes and skin, and flu-like symptoms.

**Word on the street** It is the inflammation of the liver, which can be caused through many types of viruses that act differently. **Type A** is a common infection that can be contracted by eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Personal hygiene is important. **Type B** is very infectious. It can be spread by unprotected sex with someone who is infected, sharing contaminated needles or other drug-injecting equipment. It can also be spread if blood from an infected person enters the body of an uninfected person. **Type C** can be transmitted by having sex with someone who is infected and who has sores on their genitals that may bleed.

**Street name** The Dragon, Hep A, Hep B or Hep C

**Symptoms** Short, mild flu-like illness, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, weight loss, itchy skin, yellow skin and eyes, and darker yellow urine.

**Can it be cured?** No. If it is left untreated, possible consequences include miscarriage and liver problems. The virus may remain in the body for life. Most people with hepatitis B and C feel better after 2 to 3 months of rest, proper medical care and medication.