Sexually Transmitted Disease

Sexually transmitted disease (STD) refers to any infection that is passed from person to person during sexual activity. This may happen by way of saliva, semen, blood, vaginal mucus, or urine. Infections are passed in many ways. For example, the common cold could be passed during sexual activity, but it is not considered a sexually transmitted infection.

CAUSES

Sexual activity is the contact between the genitals of one partner and the genitals, anus, eyes, mouth, or throat of another. These activities include sexual intercourse, the sharing of sex toys, needles, or any other intimate contact of the genitals, mouth, or rectal areas. An STD may be spread by bacteria (*germ*), virus, or parasite. These small germ-like agents can enter the body and infect the skin and linings of the:

- Vagina.
- Rectum.
- Urethra.
- Cervix.
- Eyes.
- Mouth.
- Throat.

HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B infection can also be spread by needles, through the blood.

Common STDs include:

- Gonorrhea.
- Chlamydia.
- Syphilis.
- HIV/AIDS (*human immunodeficiency virus / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome*).
- Genital herpes.
- Hepatitis B.
- Trichomonas.
- Human papilloma virus (HPV).
- Pubic lice.

SYMPTOMS

Some people may not have any symptoms, but can still transmit the infection to others.

- Painful or bloody urination.
- Pain in the pelvis, abdomen, vagina, anus, throat, or eyes. Where it hurts depends on the type of sexual contact.
- Skin rash, itching, irritation, growths, or lesions (*sores, ulcer*). These usually occur in the genital or anal area. These growths may or may not be painful, irritated, or itch.
- Abnormal vaginal discharge.
- Fever.
- Pain or bleeding during sexual intercourse.
- Swollen glands in the groin area.
- Yellow skin and eyes, seen with hepatitis (*jaundice*).

RISK FACTORS

- Having multiple sex partners.
- Having a sex partner who has other sex partners.
- Taking illegal drugs or drinking too much alcohol. This can affect your judgment and put you in a vulnerable position.
- Having unprotected sex, not using condoms.
- Having open sores on your skin or in your mouth, during sexual activity.
- Being involved in high-risk sexual acts.
- Engaging in oral or anal sex.

DIAGNOSIS

- Diagnosis of sexually transmitted infections begins with your caregiver taking your medical history and performing a physical exam. Additional testing may be required.

- Cultures are used to diagnose some STDs, including gonorrhea and chlamydia. A specimen is taken, grown in the laboratory for a day or two, and then identified. Newer tests can diagnose certain STDs, such as chlamydia, within minutes.
- Trichomonas or syphilis can be seen through a microscope, in a sample of discharge.
- Syphilis can be seen through a microscope or diagnosed with a blood test.
- HIV and hepatitis B can be diagnosed with a blood test.
- Pubic lice, which look like tiny bugs in the pubic hair, can usually be seen with a magnifying glass or a microscope.
- The appearance of sores or blisters on the skin is enough to make a diagnosis and begin treatment for genital herpes.
- HPV (*human papilloma virus*) is seen on a Pap test. There are several types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.
- Colposcopy (*applying special solution and looking at the cervix with a lighted, magnifying tube*) is used to see the problem better when diagnosing HPV.
- Laparoscopy (*looking into the pelvis at the female organs, with a lighted tube, through a small incision*) can also be used for diagnosis.

TREATMENT

- Chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomonas, and syphilis can be cured with antibiotics (injected, oral, vaginal creams, suppositories). These are medicines that kill germs.
- Genital herpes, hepatitis, and HIV cannot be cured. They often can be treated with medicines, to lessen the symptoms.
- Genital warts from HPV can be removed with medicine, freezing, electrocautery (*burning*), or surgery. But the warts may come back.
- All sexual partners should be informed, tested, and treated for all STDs.
- Surgery can be used for removal of HPV of the cervix, vagina, or vulva.
- If you have one STD, you are also at risk for all others. If one is discovered, treatment often will be started to cover other possible infections. This may be done even if other infections are not proven with testing.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS AND PREVENTION:

- **Finish all medicine as prescribed.** Incomplete treatment of chlamydia and gonorrhea puts women at risk of becoming sterile (*unable to have children*). Women are also at risk of having a tubal pregnancy (*pregnancy outside the uterus*), which can be life threatening. Sterility or tubal pregnancies can occur even in fully treated individuals. Following the prescribed treatment decreases the chance. That is why it is important to **finish ALL medicines** given to you.
- Return immediately if you develop an oral temperature of 100ºF (37.8ºC) or higher.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Rest and eat a balanced diet with plenty of fluids.
- **Do not have sex until treatment is completed** and you have followed up at your caregiver's office or the clinic to which you were referred. If your diagnosis is confirmed by culture or another method, your recent sexual partners need treatment. This is true even if they are problem free or have a negative culture or evaluation. They also should not have sex until their caregiver says it is ok.

STDs should be checked after treatment.

- HIV and hepatitis need frequent blood tests and follow-up examinations. This is to monitor the effects of the infection on your body. Any new or worsening symptoms should be reported to your caregiver.
- HPV needs follow-up Pap tests.
- Only use latex condoms and water-soluble lubricants. Do not use vaseline or oils.
- Avoid alcohol and illegal drugs, because they can affect your mind, and you may end up not practicing safe sex.
- A vaccine is available for HPV and hepatitis. Everyone should get the vaccine.

- Avoid risky sex practices that can break the skin, because it makes you more at risk for an STD.
- Oral, vaginal ring, patches, hormone injection contraceptives, spermicides, diaphragm, IUD, and cervical caps do not protect against STDs.

PROGNOSIS

Long-term effects vary, depending on the type and severity of the STD, and the effectiveness of the treatment. An STD can be treated and cured in one week, one or more months, or an STD and its symptoms can last for many years, or even a lifetime (HIV and hepatitis). STDs can also cause damage to the female organs, chronic pelvic pain, infertility, and recurrences of the STD, especially genital herpes, hepatitis, and HIV.

- Trichomonas and pubic lice have few or no long-term effects, other than continued symptoms.
- Frequent STDs can cause:
  - Chronic (*ongoing*) pelvic pain, or closing of the urethra in the penis.
- Chlamydia and gonorrhea can cause:
  - Infertility.
  - Chronic pelvic inflammatory disease, and chronic pain.
- HPV infections increase a woman's risk of having abnormal cells in her cervix and developing cervical cancer.
- HPV causes genital warts, which can come back even after treatment.
- Several types of HPV (not warts) cause cervical cancer. HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer.
- HIV can progress to AIDS and result in death.
- Hepatitis B can cause permanent liver damage, liver cancer, and death.
- Syphilis can be cured in the early stages. But in advanced stages, it causes permanent brain and heart damage, and death.
- Syphilis during pregnancy, if not treated, can cause:
  - Deformities.
  - Death of the baby.

WARNING:You have been diagnosed with an STD, or you may have an STD. All sexually transmitted infections are contagious. People who have an STD or are being evaluated for a possible STD should not have sexual contact with another person until they receive treatment, until the infection has cleared, or until tests are negative for STD. All STDs can be transmitted to babies before or during birth. Effects of STD infection on babies depend on the infection and the effectiveness of treatment. Effects can include infections, birth defects, and even death.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You think you have an STD, even if you do not have symptoms. Call your caregiver for evaluation and treatment, if needed.
- You think or know your sex partner has an STD.
- You have any of the symptoms mentioned above.

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