



SHARP FACTS

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

November 23, 2007



What are STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, are diseases you can get by having sex - vaginal, oral, or anal - with someone who is already infected. STDs are caused by bacteria or viruses that are spread through blood, semen and vaginal fluids. Some STDs, like herpes and genital warts, are also spread simply by touching infected skin. If a woman is pregnant and has an STD, she and her fetus may both be affected. Anyone who is sexually active can get an STD. The U.S. still has the highest rates of STDs in the industrialized world, with rates that are much higher than other industrialized nations. There are an estimated 19 million new cases of STDs in the U.S. each year. Of these, about one-quarter occur among teenagers, 15 to 19 years old.

Dangerous Consequences

Most Americans are aware of HIV infection and AIDS, the most deadly of all STDs. But, for much of society, the other serious risks related to unsafe sexual behaviors may have been forgotten. There are over 20 diseases that are transmitted sexually. Many have serious and costly consequences. Some of the most common and serious STDs include:

Chlamydia: Over 1,000,000 new cases were reported in the U.S. in 2006. As many as 1 in 20 young, sexually experienced, American females may be infected. Most infected females don't know it, and about 75% have no symptoms.

Gonorrhea: Over 358,000 new cases were reported in the U.S. in 2006. Most infected females don't know it, and about 75% have no symptoms.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV): It has been estimated that over 5,000,000 new infections occur each year in the U.S. Over 50% of sexually active Americans will get HPV at some point in their lives. Most people who get HPV won't know they have it and most won't be harmed by it. However, in some people HPV can cause cervical cancer, genital warts and other diseases.

NOTE: If not adequately treated, many women infected with chlamydia or gonorrhea may develop upper genital tract infection, also called **pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)**. PID may result in infertility, potentially fatal ectopic pregnancy, and chronic pelvic pain. **Ectopic pregnancy** is a leading cause of first trimester pregnancy-related deaths among American women.

Sexually transmitted HPV is the single most important risk factor for **cervical cancer**.

One of the best and proven steps that a woman can take to prevent cervical cancer is to have a Pap test. The Pap test looks for changes in the cervix that might lead to cancer. If cancer does occur, the Pap test can find it early when it is easier to treat. Your doctor or nurse can tell you how often you should have a Pap test.

In addition, there are non-cancer-inducing types of HPV that cause genital warts. There are many treatments, but no cures for genital warts. The warts may go away, but the virus remains and others can be infected.

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Genital Herpes: Genital herpes infection is common in the United States. Nationwide, at least 45 million people ages 12 and older, or one out of five adolescents and adults, have had genital HSV infection. Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, the number of Americans with genital herpes infection increased 30 percent. Genital HSV-2 infection is more common in women (approximately one out of four women) than in men (almost one out of five). This may be due to male-to-female transmissions being more likely than female-to-male transmission.

Herpes is one of the most common STDs in the U.S. It is estimated that as many as 45 million Americans may now carry the herpes virus. There is no cure, but there are drugs to reduce the pain and length of outbreaks and reduce the likelihood of infecting a sexual partner. [Genital herpes](#) is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the herpes simplex viruses type 1 (HSV-1) and type 2 (HSV-2). Most genital herpes is caused by HSV-2. Most individuals have no or only minimal signs or symptoms from HSV-1 or HSV-2 infection. When signs do occur, they typically appear as one or more blisters on or around the genitals or rectum. The blisters break, leaving tender ulcers (sores) that may take two to four weeks to heal the first time they occur. Typically, another outbreak can appear weeks or months after the first, but it almost always is less severe and shorter than the first outbreak. Although the infection can stay in the body indefinitely, the number of outbreaks tends to decrease over a period of years.

Syphilis: An estimated 70,000 new cases each year. Syphilis is caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*, and is passed from person to person through direct contact with a syphilis sore during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Sores occur mainly on the external genitals, vagina, anus, or in the rectum. Sores also can occur on the lips and in the mouth. Pregnant women with the disease can pass it to the babies they are carrying. Many people infected with syphilis do not have any symptoms for years, yet remain at risk for late complications if they are not treated. Although transmission appears to occur from persons with sores who are in the primary or secondary stage, many of these sores are unrecognized. Thus, most transmission is from persons who are unaware of their infection.

HIV: An estimated 40,000 new infections each year in the U.S. and over 1,000,000 Americans are living with HIV. Many people infected with HIV look and feel healthy - but they can still pass their infection on to others. It has been estimated that 1 in 4 Americans with HIV do not even know it themselves. New advancements in the treatment of HIV disease can increase the quality of and prolong life for people with HIV infection, but there remains no cure and no vaccine. Prevention remains our best and most cost-effective tool for saving lives and bringing the epidemic under control.

How can I tell if my partner or I have an STD?

It is possible for you or your partner to have an STD and not even know it. A person can have an STD, such as chlamydia or HIV, and not have any symptoms.

Where can I get more information?

Your medical care provider should be consulted if you think you may have been exposed to any sexually transmitted disease. CDC provides information through their National STD Hotline at (800) 227-8922 and their National AIDS Hotline at (800) 342-AIDS (2437). For further information regarding your sexual health, visit the SHARP Home Page at <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp/sharp>.

This information was adapted by the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program (SHARP), Directorate of Health Promotion and Population Health, Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center from material developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV, STD & TB Prevention, Division of STD Prevention