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A safe, private place to get doctor-approved information on health, emotions, and life.

About Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infectious diseases that spread from person to person through intimate contact. STDs can affect guys and girls of all ages and backgrounds who are having sex — it doesn't matter if they're rich or poor.

Unfortunately, STDs (sometimes also called STIs for "sexually transmitted infections") have become common among teens. Because teens are more at risk for getting some STDs, it's important to learn what you can do to protect yourself.

STDs are more than just an embarrassment. They're a serious health problem. If untreated, some STDs can cause permanent damage, such as infertility (the inability to have a baby) and even death (in the case of HIV/AIDS).

How STDs Spread

One reason STDs spread is because people think they can only be infected if they have sexual intercourse. That's wrong. A person can get some STDs, like herpes or genital warts, through skin-to-skin contact with an infected area or sore.

Another myth about STDs is that you can't get them if you have oral or anal sex. That's also wrong because the viruses or bacteria that cause STDs can enter the body through tiny cuts or tears in the mouth and anus, as well as the genitals.

STDs also spread easily because you can't tell whether someone has an infection. In fact, some people with STDs don't even know that they have them. These people are in danger of passing an infection on to their sex partners without even realizing it.

Some of the things that increase a person's chances of getting an STD are:

- **Sexual activity at a young age.** The younger a person starts having sex, the greater his or her chances of becoming infected with an STD.
- **Lots of sex partners.** People who have sexual contact — not just intercourse, but any form of intimate activity — with many different partners are more at risk than those who stay with the same partner.
- **Unprotected sex.** Latex condoms are the only form of birth control that reduce your risk of getting an STD, and must be used every time. Spermicides, diaphragms, and other birth control methods may help prevent pregnancy, but they don't protect a person against STDs.

Preventing and Treating STDs

As with many other diseases, prevention is key. It's much easier to prevent STDs than to treat them. The only way to completely prevent STDs is to abstain from all types of sexual contact. If someone is going to have sex, the best way to reduce the chance of getting an STD is by using a condom every time (or a dental dam when a girl is receiving oral sex).

People who are considering having sex should get regular gynecological or male genital examinations. There are two reasons for this. First, these exams give doctors a chance to teach people about STDs and protecting themselves. And second, regular exams give doctors more opportunities to check for STDs while they're still in their earliest, most treatable stage.

In order for these exams and visits to the doctor to be helpful, people need to tell their doctors if they are thinking about having sex or if they have already started having sex. This is true for all types of sex — oral, vaginal, and anal. And let the doctor know if you've ever had any type of sexual contact, even if

it was in the past.

Don't let embarrassment at the thought of having an STD keep you from seeking medical attention. Waiting to see a doctor may allow a disease to progress and cause more damage. If you think you may have an STD, or if you have had a partner who may have an STD, you should see a doctor right away.

If you don't have a doctor or prefer not to see your family doctor, you may be able to find a local clinic in your area where you can get an exam confidentially. Some national and local organizations operate STD hotlines staffed by trained specialists who can answer your questions and provide referrals. Calls to these hotlines are confidential. One hotline you can call for information is the National STD Hotline at 1-800-227-8922.

Not all infections in the genitals are caused by STDs. Sometimes people can get symptoms that seem very like those of STDs, even though they've never had sex. For girls, a yeast infection can easily be confused with an STD. Guys may worry about bumps on the penis that turn out to be pimples or irritated hair follicles. That's why it's important to see a doctor if you ever have questions about your sexual health.

More Information

For more information about the signs, symptoms, and treatments of some common STDs, click on the links below.

- Chlamydia
- Genital Herpes (HSV-2)
- Genital Warts
- Gonorrhea
- Hepatitis B (HBV)
- HIV and AIDS
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
- Pubic Lice (Crabs)
- Syphilis
- Trichomoniasis

Reviewed by: Larissa Hirsch, MD

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Gonorrhea

What Is Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea (pronounced: gah-nuh-REE-uh) is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by bacteria called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. The bacteria can be passed from one person to another through vaginal, oral, or anal sex, even when the person who is infected has no symptoms.

Gonorrhea also can be passed from a mother to her baby during birth. You can't catch it from a towel, a doorknob, or a toilet seat.

What Are the Signs of Gonorrhea in Girls?

A girl who has gonorrhea may have no symptoms at all or her symptoms may be so mild that she doesn't notice them until they become more severe. In some cases, girls will feel a burning sensation when they pee, or they will have a yellow-green vaginal discharge. Girls also may have vaginal bleeding between menstrual periods.

If the infection spreads and moves into the uterus or fallopian tubes, it may cause an infection called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can cause abdominal pain, fever, and pain during sex, as well as the symptoms above.

What Are the Signs of Gonorrhea in Guys?

Guys who have gonorrhea are much more likely to notice symptoms, although a guy can have gonorrhea and not know it. Guys often feel a burning sensation when they pee, and yellowish-white discharge may ooze out of the urethra (at the tip of the penis).

How Long Until There Are Symptoms?

Symptoms usually start 2 to 7 days after a person is exposed to gonorrhea. In girls, they might start even later.

What Problems Can Happen?

Gonorrhea can be very dangerous if it's not treated, even in someone who has mild or no symptoms:

- **In girls**, the infection can move into the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries (causing PID) and can lead to scarring and infertility (the inability to have a baby). Gonorrhea infection during pregnancy can cause problems for the newborn baby, including meningitis (an inflammation of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord) and an eye infection that can result in blindness if it is not treated.
- **In guys**, gonorrhea can spread to the epididymis (the structure attached to the testicle that helps transport sperm), causing pain and swelling in the testicular area. This can create scar tissue that might make a guy infertile.

In both guys and girls, untreated gonorrhea can affect other organs and parts of the body, including the throat, eyes, heart, brain, skin, and joints, although this is less common.

How Is Gonorrhea Diagnosed?

Doctors now test teens 15 and older for STDs as part of annual checkups, regardless of whether the teens disclose they are having oral, anal, or vaginal sex. This is to make sure that everyone who needs treatment gets it. All teens who are having oral, vaginal, or anal sex should get tested at least once a year for gonorrhea.

If you think you may have gonorrhea or if you have had a partner who may have gonorrhea, you need to see your doctor or gynecologist. He or she will do an exam that may include checking a urine (pee) sample. In some cases, testing may require swabbing of opening of the penis or the vagina or cervix for discharge. Talk to your doctor about which test is best for you.

The doctor also may test for other STDs, such as HIV, syphilis, and chlamydia. Let the doctor know the best way to reach you confidentially with any test results.

How Is Gonorrhea Treated?

If you have gonorrhea, your doctor will prescribe antibiotics to treat the infection. Any sexual partners should also be tested and treated for gonorrhea immediately. This includes any partners in the last 2 months, or your last sexual partner if it has been more than 2 months since you last had sex.

If a sexual partner has gonorrhea, quick treatment will reduce the risk of complications for that person and will lower your chances of being reinfected if you have sex with that partner again. (You can become infected with gonorrhea again even after treatment — having it once doesn't make you immune to it.)

Don't have sex for at least 7 days after you and your partner have both **finished** taking your antibiotics. If you have sex earlier than that, you could be reinfected.

Can Gonorrhea Be Prevented?

It's better to prevent gonorrhea than to treat it, and the best way to completely prevent the infection is to not have sex (oral, vaginal, or anal).

If you do have sex, use a latex condom every time. This is the only birth control method that will help prevent gonorrhea.

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Genital Warts (HPV)

What Are They?

Genital warts are warts that are near or on a person's genital areas. For a girl, that means on or near the vulva (the outside genital area), vagina, cervix, or anus. For a guy, that means near or on the penis, scrotum, or anus.

Warts appear as bumps or growths. They can be flat or raised, single or many, small or large. They tend to be whitish or flesh colored. They are not always easy to see, so people who have genital warts often don't know they have them.

Genital warts are caused by a group of viruses called HPV (short for **human papillomavirus**). There are more than 100 types of HPV. Some of them cause the kind of warts you see on people's hands and feet. Genital warts and the kinds of warts on hands and feet are usually caused by *different* types of HPV.

More than 40 types of HPV cause genital warts. Genital warts can be passed from person to person through intimate sexual contact (touching someone's genitals or having vaginal, oral, or anal sex). In some rare cases, genital warts are transmitted from a mother to her baby during childbirth.

HPV infections are common in teens and young adults. The more sexual partners someone has, the more likely it is that the person will get an HPV infection.

How Do People Know They Have HPV?

Most HPV infections have no signs or symptoms. So someone can be infected and pass the disease on to another person without knowing.

Some people do get visible warts. Although warts might hurt, itch, or feel uncomfortable, *most of the time they don't*. This is one reason why people may not know they have genital warts.

Doctors can diagnose warts by examining the skin closely (sometimes with a magnifying glass) and using a special solution to make them easier to see. Tests like Pap smears can help doctors find out if someone has an HPV infection.

Experts believe that when a wart is present, the virus may be more contagious. But HPV can still spread even if you can't see warts.

When Do Symptoms Start?

Warts can appear any time from several weeks to several months after a person has been exposed to them. Sometimes they might take even longer to appear because the virus can live in the body for a very long time before showing up as warts.

When to See a Doctor

See your doctor, gynecologist, or visit a health clinic if:

- you are having sex or have had sex in the past or have touched someone's genitals
- you have a bump or lump "down there"
- you think you might have genital warts
- you have had a partner who might have genital warts

Because many people who are infected with HPV don't show any symptoms, everyone having sex should get regular medical checkups and tell their doctor about their sexual history.

Not all bumps on a person's genitals are warts. Some can be pimples, other infections, or growths. Turn to your doctor for help — he or she can help figure out what a bump is and what you can do.

What Can Happen?

If a person doesn't get treated, genital warts can sometimes grow bigger and multiply. Even if warts go away on their own, the virus is still in the body. That means warts can come back or the virus can spread to other people.

How Are They Prevented?

The best way to avoid genital warts is not having sex of any kind (abstinence). That means not having vaginal, oral, or anal sex. Preventing HPV infection also means not touching the genitals of someone who is infected with HPV.

People who have sex should use a condom every time to protect against STDs. Condoms are a good defense against warts, but they can't completely protect against them. That's because the virus can spread from or to the parts of the genitals not covered by a condom.

Doctors recommend that girls ages 11 through 26 and guys 11 through 21 get the HPV vaccine. The vaccine protects against some types of HPV that cause genital warts and certain types of cancer.

How Are Warts Treated?

There is no cure that gets rid of the human papillomavirus completely. But treatments can reduce the number of warts — or help them go away faster. When the warts go away, the virus is still there. It could still spread to someone else.

A doctor will do an examination, make a diagnosis, and then provide treatment, if necessary. A number of different treatments might be used depending on where the warts are, how big they are, and how many there are. The doctor might put special medications on the warts or remove them with treatments like laser therapy or chemical "freezing."

Sometimes warts can come back, so you might need to visit the doctor again. Anyone you've had sex with also should be checked for genital warts.

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Genital Herpes

What Is It?

Genital herpes is caused by a virus called herpes simplex (HSV). There are two different types of herpes virus that cause genital herpes — HSV-1 and HSV-2. Most forms of genital herpes are HSV-2. But a person with HSV-1 (the type of virus that causes cold sores or fever blisters around the mouth) can transmit the virus through oral sex to another person's genitals.

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). It can cause sores in the genital area and is spread through vaginal, oral, or anal sex — especially during unprotected sex when infected skin touches the vaginal, oral, or anal area. Occasionally, it can cause sores in the mouth, and can be spread through saliva (spit). Because the virus does not live outside the body for long, you cannot catch genital herpes from an object, such as a toilet seat.

Symptoms of an Outbreak

Someone who has been exposed to the genital herpes virus might not be aware of being infected and might never have an outbreak of sores. However, if a person does have an outbreak, the symptoms can cause a lot of discomfort.

Someone with genital herpes may first notice itching or pain, followed by sores that appear a few hours to a few days later. The sores, which may appear on the vagina, penis, scrotum, buttocks, or anus, start out as red bumps that soon turn into red, watery blisters. The sores might make it very painful to urinate (pee). The sores may open up, ooze fluid, or bleed; during a first herpes outbreak, they can take from a week to several weeks to heal. The entire genital area may feel very tender or painful, and the person may have flu-like symptoms (such as fever; a headache; and tender, swollen lymph nodes in the groin area).

If future outbreaks happen, they tend to be less severe and don't last as long, with sores healing faster.

How Long Until Symptoms Appear?

Someone who has been exposed to genital herpes will notice genital itching and/or pain about 2 to 20 days after being infected with the virus. The sores usually appear within days afterward.

What Can Happen?

After the herpes blisters disappear, a person may think the virus has gone away — but it's actually hiding in the body. Both HSV-1 and HSV-2 can stay hidden away in the body until the next herpes outbreak, when the virus reactivates itself and the sores return, usually in the same area.

Over time, the herpes virus can reactivate itself again and again, causing discomfort and episodes of sores each time. The number of future outbreaks can vary (some people might have four or five a year; others might have one or none) and usually lessen over time.

At this time there is no cure for herpes; it remains in the body and can be passed to another person with any form of unprotected sex. This is the case even if blisters aren't present, but more likely if they are. A person can lessen the chance of spreading the infection to someone else by taking an antiviral medicine. This is a medication that must be prescribed by a doctor.

Genital herpes also increases a person's risk of HIV infection because HIV can enter the body more easily whenever there's a break in the skin (such as a sore) during unprotected sexual contact.

If a pregnant woman with genital herpes has an active infection during childbirth, the newborn baby is at risk for getting it. To prevent this, she may have a C-section to avoid passing the infection to the baby. Herpes infection in a newborn can cause meningitis (an inflammation of the membranes that surround the brain and spinal cord), seizures, and brain damage.

How Is It Prevented?

The best way to prevent genital herpes is abstinence. Teens who do have sex must properly use a latex condom every time they have any form of sexual intercourse (vaginal, oral, or anal sex). Girls receiving oral sex should have their partners use dental dams as protection. These sheets of thin latex can be purchased online or from many pharmacies.

If one partner has a herpes outbreak, avoid sex — even with a condom or dental dam — until all sores have healed. Herpes can be passed sexually even if a partner has no sores or other signs and symptoms of an outbreak. Finally, one way to lessen this risk is to take antiviral medication even when no sores are present if you know you have genital herpes.

How Is It Treated?

If you think you may have genital herpes or if you have had a partner who may have genital herpes, see your family doctor, adolescent doctor, gynecologist, or health clinic for a diagnosis.

Right now, there is no cure for genital herpes, but a doctor can prescribe antiviral medication to help control recurring HSV-2 and clear up the painful sores. The doctor can also tell you how to keep the sores clean and dry and suggest other methods to ease the discomfort if the virus reappears.

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Chlamydia

What Is It?

Chlamydia (pronounced: kluh-MID-ee-uh) is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by bacteria called *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Although you may not be familiar with its name, chlamydia is one of the most common STDs. Because there often aren't any symptoms, though, lots of people can have chlamydia and not know it.

The bacteria can move from one person to another through vaginal, oral, or anal sex. If someone touches body fluids that contain the bacteria and then touches his or her eye, a chlamydial eye infection (chlamydial conjunctivitis) is possible.

Chlamydia also can be passed from a mother to her baby while the baby is being delivered. This can cause pneumonia and conjunctivitis, which can become very serious for the baby if it's not treated. You can't catch chlamydia from a towel, doorknob, or toilet seat.

How Does a Girl Know She Has It?

It can be difficult for a girl to know whether she has chlamydia because most girls don't have any symptoms. Because of this, it's very important to see a doctor and get tested for chlamydia at least once a year if you are having vaginal, oral, or anal sex. Your doctor can tell you about how to test for chlamydia, even if you don't have any symptoms.

Much less often, a girl can have symptoms, such as an unusual vaginal discharge or pain during urination (peeing). Some girls with chlamydia also have pain in their lower abdomens, pain during sexual intercourse, or bleeding between menstrual periods.

How Does a Guy Know He Has It?

It also can be difficult for guys to know if they have chlamydia. Many who do have it will have few or no symptoms, so any guy who is having vaginal, oral, or anal sex should be tested by a doctor at least once a year.

When symptoms are there, guys may have a discharge from the tip of the penis (the **urethra** — where urine comes out), or itching or burning sensations around the penis. Rarely, one of the testicles may become swollen.

When Do Symptoms Appear?

Someone who has chlamydia may see symptoms a week later. In some people, the symptoms take up to 3 weeks to appear, and many people never develop any symptoms.

What Can Happen?

If left untreated in girls, chlamydia can cause an infection of the urethra (where urine comes out) and inflammation (swelling and soreness caused by the infection) of the cervix. It can also lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which is an infection of the uterus, ovaries, and/or fallopian tubes. PID can cause infertility and ectopic (tubal) pregnancies later in life.

If left untreated in guys, chlamydia can cause swelling and irritation of the urethra and epididymis (the structure attached to the testicle that helps transport sperm).

How Is It Treated?

If you think you may have chlamydia — or if you have had vaginal, oral, or anal sex with a partner who may have chlamydia — you need to see your family doctor, adolescent doctor, or gynecologist. Some local health clinics, such as Planned Parenthood, also can test and treat people for chlamydia. It's now routine for doctors to check all teens 15 years of age and up for chlamydia, regardless of whether they say they're having sex — this is to make sure that everyone who needs treatment gets it.

Doctors usually diagnose chlamydia by testing a person's urine. If you have been exposed to chlamydia or are diagnosed with chlamydia, the doctor will prescribe antibiotics, which should clear up the infection in 7 to 10 days.

Anyone with whom you've had sex will also need to be tested and treated for chlamydia because that person may be infected but not have any symptoms. This includes any sexual partners in the last 2 months or your last sexual partner if it has been more than 2 months since your last sexual experience. It's very important for people diagnosed with chlamydia to abstain from having sex until they and their partner have been treated.

If a sexual partner has chlamydia, quick treatment will reduce his or her risk of complications and will lower your chances of being reinfected if you have sex with that partner again. (You can become infected with chlamydia again even after you have been treated — having chlamydia once does not make you immune to it.)

It's better to prevent chlamydia than to treat it, and the best way to prevent the infection is to abstain from all types of sexual intercourse. If you do have sex, use a latex condom every time. This is the only birth control method that will help prevent chlamydia.

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Name _____

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

1. What are sexually transmitted diseases?

2. Who can be affected by STD's?

3. How are 3 ways STD's can be spread?

1.

2.

3.

4. What are 3 things that can increase a person's chances of getting an STD?

1.

2.

3.

5. How can one contract an STD through oral or anal sex?

Name _____

Gonorrhoea

1. What bacteria causes Gonorrhoea?

2. How is Gonorrhoea passed from one person to another?

3. What are 3 signs of Gonorrhoea in females?

1.

2.

3.

4. What are 2 signs of Gonorrhoea in males?

1.

2.

5. What 2 problems can occur in males and females if Gonorrhoea is left untreated?

Females 1.

2.

Males 1.

2.

6. How is Gonorrhoea treated?

Name _____

Genital Warts (Human Papillomavirus)

1. If contracted, where would genital warts be located on a male and female?

Male –

Female -

2. What are some signs and symptoms of HPV?

3. Name 3 ways to prevent contracting genital warts?

1.

2.

3.

4. How are warts treated?

Name _____

Genital Herpes

1. What are the differences between Herpes Simplex Virus 1 and Herpes Simplex Virus 2??

HSV-1
HSV-2

2. If symptoms occur, what might a genital outbreak look/ feel like?

Look –
Feel -

3. How long does it take for symptoms to appear?

--

4. If a person has genital herpes, what is the cure?

--

5. What are the 2 best ways to prevent genital herpes?

1.
2.

Name _____

Chlamydia

1. Chlamydia is one of the most common STD's. How is the bacteria transferred between people?

2. How does a girl know she has Chlamydia?

Look –

Feel -

3. How does a boy know he has Chlamydia?

Look –

Feel -

4. If Chlamydia is left untreated, what can happen?

5. How is Chlamydia treated?

1.

2.