

# Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)



If an infection is “sexually transmitted” it means a person gets it only by having vaginal, anal or oral sex with an infected person. This is because these infections live in the vagina, rectum, penis and throat. They are found in the blood or body fluids from these areas, or around the genital area itself. Anyone who thinks they have one of these infections or may have had contact with someone who has an infection should get tested as soon as possible. Anyone who has pain with urinating (peeing), drainage, sores, rashes or bumps in and/or around the genital area should get tested - these are signs of STI’s. Some of these infections can be passed from a mother to her baby during pregnancy or birth. If a pregnant woman has these infections or thinks she does, she should see her doctor right away to get testing and medicine.

**Chlamydia, Gonorrhea and Trichomonas** are each caused by different bacteria. It is possible to have more than one of these infections at the same time. Most women and some men have no symptoms with these infections. You can have an infection and not know it and pass it to others. These infections are curable with antibiotics but you can get them again if you have sex with someone who is infected. If you do not take medicine for these infections, a more serious infection can develop. Urine or a swab, collected from the vagina, rectum, throat or penis, is used to test for these infections. The signs and symptoms of these infections are different for women and men. **Women:** • New or different discharge from vagina • urinating (peeing) often or with pain • pain in the lower belly • pain with vaginal sex • changes in bleeding/periods.

**Men:** • Discharge from the penis (a watery white, yellow or brown drip) • pain with urinating (peeing) • pain in the testicles.

**Syphilis** is caused by bacteria. Syphilis occurs in stages with symptoms in each stage being different, so it can be difficult to detect by symptoms alone. Syphilis is easily found with a blood test and can be cured with antibiotics. If untreated, syphilis can cause blindness, a decrease in mental functions, and even death. Syphilis can be passed from a mother to her baby during pregnancy which can cause the baby to be stillborn or have a physical deformity. The first symptom with syphilis is an open, painless sore. The sore can be followed by one or more of the following symptoms: fever, rash, hair loss or muscle aches and pains. Even though these symptoms go away, a person still has the infection and may be able to pass it on to others, until he or she gets medication.

**Genital Warts** are caused by a virus called the human papilloma virus (HPV). This causes cauliflower-like bumps in the genital area. There is no “cure” for infection but the bumps can and should be removed to prevent spreading on your genitals and to a sexual partner. If the warts come back, continue to have them removed. Some forms of HPV are invisible and can cause changes in the cells of the cervix, the upper part of the uterus, that lead to cervical cancer. Yearly Pap Smears are important because they help find these early changes. There are a variety of ways a doctor can destroy these early abnormal cells and prevent cancer from developing. Early detection is key in preventing more serious problems with this and all STI’s.

**Molluscum Contagiosum** is caused by a virus you get by having skin to skin contact with someone who has it. This may include sexual contact. Firm, flesh colored bumps with sunken centers appears when someone has this infection. These bumps usually go away on their own after several months, but you may choose to have them removed to prevent spreading them to a sexual partner.

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**Herpes** is caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus. When this infection is found in the genital area it is called “genital herpes.” (Herpes is also found around the mouth –these are “cold sores.”) Herpes sores can come and go. When they are present, it is called an “outbreak.” Outbreaks can happen once a month, several times a year or less often. This infection can be spread to a partner at any time but is more likely to be spread when the sores are present. There is no medication to cure the infection, but medication can help control how many, how long and how bad the outbreaks are. If sores are present, a mother can pass this infection to her baby during birth.

**Crabs** are little bugs called pubic lice that are spread through sex or close personal contact with someone who has them. They can also be passed through shared towels, clothing and linens. They cause severe itching in the genital area and do not go away on their own. Medication is available without a prescription to get rid of crabs. All towels, clothing and linens should be hot washed and hot dried after treatment to kill the eggs and prevent hatching of new crabs.

**Hepatitis B** is an infection of the liver that is caused by a virus you get by having sex with an infected person. It can also be spread by sharing needles for injecting drugs, or needles used for tattooing or piercing of body parts. Many people who get this infection can fight it off. Some people will become a carrier of Hepatitis B and can pass it to others. You can get a vaccine (three shots) to prevent you from getting this infection.

**HIV** is the virus that causes **AIDS**. It can be spread by having vaginal, oral and/or anal sex with an infected person. Sharing needles for injecting drugs, tattooing or piercing are also risks for getting HIV. An HIV infected mother can pass it to her baby during birth or through breast feeding. HIV is NOT spread through casual contact (hugging, shaking hands, etc.).

### **Prevention**

- Have all your partners tested and treated. If they are not cured, they can pass it back to you or to others.
- **DO NOT SHARE YOUR MEDICINE WITH YOUR PARTNER!** The amount given to you is only enough to cure your infection.
- Abstain from having sex with your partner(s). Discover and explore other ways to express your sexual self that don't include vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- Only have sex with a partner who only has sex with you. To reduce the chances of getting an infection when you have more than one partner, use condoms and get tested before having sex with a new partner.
- Limit your number of sex partners - the more partners you have, the higher your risk for getting an infection.
- Use condoms (rubbers) and dental dams every time you have vaginal, oral and anal sex.
- Alcohol and drugs lower inhibitions (take your guard down). If you are more likely to make different decisions for yourself when you have been drinking, you may want to drink less or be sure to have condoms with you.
- Do not share IV needles. Used needles, “works” and straws may have blood on them and can increase the chances of coming in contact with infections like Hepatitis C and HIV.

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*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have questions or think you may have a STI, call your health care provider.*