

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

STD's-A Brief Overview

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(For more information contact your doctor or health care practitioner.)

Sexually transmitted diseases are caused by a virus or bacteria, like many other diseases however there is a stigma attached to having or living with an STD. Despite the stigma, a very high percentage of people from all walks of life are living with or have had STD's in their past. Most people are not comfortable with discussing STD's even with their physician. However it is important to do so because many of these diseases can be cured with something as simple as an antibiotic. More importantly, some cannot be cured but with early treatment can prevent more serious complications which can sometimes be fatal.

When we think of STD's we usually think of teenagers or those that are sexually promiscuous however the elderly are a rising population that either are acquiring or living with a sexually transmitted disease. Many times people may have an STD and not know it and thus, spread the disease unwillingly.

Although there are ways to reduce the risk, the only true prevention is to refrain from sexual activity altogether. Some people have also contracted an STD through other means such as from blood transfusions or needle sticks although it is more rare to acquire an STD in those manners.

Below is more information for your review and as usual, it is highly recommended that you discuss this topic with your physician or health care practitioner.

Risk Factors:

- Sexually Active
- Multiple Partners
- Not using protections
- IV Drug Use
- Tattoos with dirty needle or needles that are not properly sterilized
- Having Sex with a partner that has an STD
- Travel to other areas of the world where STD's are more prevalent.
- If you test positive for one STD you may be at higher risk for more.
- In some cases, if you are a man that has sex with men you may be more at risk.
- Young man in a correctional facility

Tips to know:

- Only way to fully protect oneself is to abstain from sexual activity.
- Condoms may help but are not able to fully prevent STD's.

STD's:

Gonorrhea: Most common, not always signs and symptoms, Increased urination, tingling, pain during urination, burning, discharge, may lead to other complications if untreated, caused by bacteria, Dr. will test the discharge

Chlamydia: Very common, caused by bacterial infection, signs and symptoms may include discharge, abdominal pain, pain during urination, or no s/s at all.

Dr. will swab to test or will test through a urine sample

Genital Herpes: Sores or an outbreak or no symptoms at all, can be transmitted even if the person has no outbreak and many times is transmitted by people that do not even know they have herpes, estimated 90% of people that have it don't even know it, testing may include a blood test or tissue scraping if ulcers or sores are present, tests are not conclusive as some don't detect the difference in herpes 1 or 2 (type 1 is the cold sore virus and many people have this as well)

Hepatitis: Infection that harms the liver, six different strains, Hep B Risks: In addition to above risks - blood transfusion prior to 1972, share a household with someone with Hep B (do not share toothbrushes or razors as STD's are transmitted through blood and body fluids); Symptoms include loss of appetite, fatigue, dark urine, abdominal pain, Nausea and Vomiting, yellow eyes or skin, joint pain or perhaps no signs or symptoms at all., Blood test to determine, more tests if positive such as ultrasound or biopsy of liver, may lead to more liver problems if not treated, treatment depends on severity and when noted and may include meds or liver transplant or riding it out on bed rest.

Syphilis: Bacterial infection that can attack the skin, mucous membranes, genitals, brain and heart, seeing a rise in this in men that have sex with men, s/s include painless sore or sores to begin with which may later appear in a rash form anywhere on body including soles and palms, fever, swelling of lymph glands in groin area, fatigue, soreness or aching, symptoms may disappear but disease will remain if untreated leading to more severe neurological and heart problems and can cause death if untreated; Can be transmitted through kissing and infected sores, mother to baby during pregnancy, blood transfusions, usually transmitted through intimate contact only as the bacteria is very sensitive to light etc., testing would include scraping of the sores or blood tests which would determine need for further testing if the disease has progressed to heart or neurological effects, Treatment includes antibiotics

HPV: Human Papillomavirus: A name for a group of over 100 related hpv; Infection can be transmitted even when a person has no symptoms, some of these virus' cause cervical cancer as well, about 50% of men and women contract some form of HPV and up to 80% of women by age fifty-test by papsmear or pat test, DNA test, HPV test is collected by brushing from the cervical canal, if a negative pap and negative hpv dna test you are at low risk, hpv infections that clear up on their own are common in younger woman under thirty, low risk hpv can cause genital warts and high risk cancer, no hpv test is available for men with the exception of visual inspection or biopsy of genital warts if they are present. Vaccine is available for girls and young women but this only protects against two strains that cause 90% of genital warts

Genital Warts: A form of HPV, sometimes not treated as may go away on their own, some topical applications are available through the physician, warts on the genital area should not be treated with over the counter wart remover, inform your practitioner as may require testing for precancerous and cancerous conditions, even if they disappear you are still infected with the virus, some people have warts return others do not.

HIV: Virus that attacks bodies immune system (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), the term AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is used to describe last stages of the disease, 38.6 million people in our world have HIV according to some sources, Symptoms vary, could have no symptoms initially and for years, but more commonly symptoms include: flu like such as fever headache, sore throat, swollen lymph glands, rash. Symptoms can progress to be more severe such as fever, chills, wt loss, diarrhea etc. Will be more prone to other infections since the HIV is attacking the immune system, Can be infected through sexual contact, mother to baby during pregnancy, un-sterile and contaminated dental instruments, Drug use with needles, blood

transfusions (USA has better screening in the past decade but some countries do not), accidental needle sticks

Testing can be done at clinics, doctor offices or hospitals and many times is either covered by insurance or free, mandatory reporting is necessary so if you test positive it must be reported even without your consent, testing can be done by blood or oral mucous for the antibody. Many, many other diseases and infections are associated with HIV since the immune system is affected. Medications are used for treatment but there is no cure.

Discussing STD's with your MD or practitioner:

- Not something that may be initiated by the MD so you may have to bring it up
 - Even if you don't have symptoms but have concerns due to risk factors or history this should be discussed with your MD or practitioner
 - Testing is done on individualized basis and history is considered
 - If symptoms are present testing should be done
 - Screenings can be annually for someone that is sexually active
 - Voluntary HIV testing can also be done at least one time and more so depending on the sexual history and activity especially if you are considered high risk
 - Testing can be done via a pap-smear, swabbing, urine or blood tests
 - Many insurance companies pay for testing but this needs to be discussed as well
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- If you test positive expect to experience a variety of emotions and consider some counseling to help you deal with these. Some STD's are very common so please know this and that you are not alone. Talk with your doctor and it is also recommended that you inform your partner(s) so they can receive treatment to prevent more serious risks and problems that may develop if left untreated.

For more information on sexually transmitted diseases please contact your physician, practitioner or a local clinic. Much information is also available on the internet including support numbers and groups. The health clinic in your area should also be able to assist you with questions.

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