

# ***SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES***

*Questions and Answers for  
Federal Bureau of Prisons  
Facility Staff Members*



U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Prisons

**S**exually Transmitted Diseases: Questions and Answers for Federal Bureau of Prisons Facility Staff Members provides important information about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) for health care and related professionals (unit management, social work, psychology, community corrections). This booklet highlights information on the most common STDs, and their prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.

This booklet provides information to help staff members

- Understand and appreciate their role in helping inmates discuss STDs,
- Increase their overall knowledge about STDs,
- Become aware of symptoms of STDs,
- Learn how STDs are diagnosed and treated,
- Understand the level of personal risk they may face from inmates with STDs, and
- Learn how to prevent STD infection in the workplace.

## *What is my role in discussing STDs with inmates?*

STDs are among the most common infectious diseases in the United States. Anyone who is sexually active can get an STD. Men and women of all ages, races, ethnic backgrounds, incomes, and sexual orientations are at risk for STDs if they have unprotected sex (without a condom).

Inmates entering your facility will receive information on STDs. They will learn much of the same information that is in this booklet. Inmates may have had unprotected sex before entering prison. They may have STD symptoms or questions about transmission. Inmates will be told that they should feel free to ask facility staff members questions about STDs.

This booklet can help you feel comfortable about answering some of their questions. Then you can make a referral knowing that a medical staff person will answer all their questions and run the needed tests.

## ***What should I know about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)?***

STDs are among the most common infectious diseases in the United States. There are more than 20 different STDs. They affect more than 13 million Americans each year. Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is perhaps the most serious STD. However, long-term and serious health problems can occur if an infected person does not seek treatment for common STDs like syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia.

Anyone who is sexually active can get an STD. STDs are spread through any type of unprotected sexual contact (sex without a condom, rubber, or other barrier protection). STDs can be spread between a man and a woman, or between same-sex partners.

Often a person who is infected with an STD will not have any symptoms, particularly women. Even if there are symptoms, these may be confused with symptoms of other diseases. An infected person can expose a sex partner to an STD whether or not there are symptoms.

People may have symptoms, such as pain or burning when urinating, sores on the genitals, discharge from the penis, or vaginal fluid that does not look normal.

Only a health-care provider can diagnose an STD. Any inmate who has had unprotected sex with one or more partners should be tested. Inmates who will return home may want to be tested also.

STDs can be treated. When found and treated early, almost all STDs can be treated effectively. STDs caused by viruses, such as HIV, can be treated but not cured.

## ***What are symptoms of the most common STDs?***

It is very important to inform inmates that they may have an STD but no symptoms. Even though an inmate does not see any symptoms, he or she can still infect others. They may still face serious health problems later in life.

If an inmate notices any genital sores, pain, or itching, then he or she may have an STD. If an inmate reports having discharge from his penis, pain when urinating, or pain or swelling in the testicles, he should be urged to see a health-care provider.

Women may not notice any STD symptoms. Early symptoms may be hidden because of the nature of the female body. Without treatment women may suffer from the severe, long-term effects of STDs, such as pelvic inflammatory disease or infertility.

If inmates notice any of these symptoms they should see a health-care provider. The health-care provider can check for an infection. Treatment can begin right away.

## ***Who should be tested for STDs?***

Any inmate who has had unprotected sex outside of an exclusive, single-partner relationship should be tested for STDs, regardless of symptoms.

Before being released, any inmate who plans to have sexual relationships, should be tested. The partner(s) also should be tested.

If inmates notice any burning or pain when urinating or sores around their genitals, they should be urged to see a health-care provider.

Inmates may not feel comfortable asking you about STDs. They may feel embarrassed talking about their sex lives or afraid of being judged. Remember that talking about sex is often awkward for everyone. Tell the inmates that you know how hard it is and that you are glad they spoke to you.

## ***How are STDs treated?***

Early treatment reduces the long-term problems found with STDs. If an inmate thinks he or she has an STD, a health-care provider should run tests as soon as possible. Only a health-care provider can diagnose a disease. Other inmates, partners, or friends should not try to diagnose a disease.

Bacterial STDs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis, can be treated with antibiotic drugs. If an inmate is given pills to take, they must be taken just as instructed by the doctor. Pills should not be shared with partners or friends. An infected person must not have sex while there is a risk of exposing a partner to the infection. Inmates should tell their sex partner(s) about being treated for an STD so that they can also be treated. A person may be reinfected if the partner is not treated too.

STDs caused by viruses, such as HIV or genital herpes, cannot be cured. Infected inmates will have these diseases for life. Doctors can give drugs to lessen herpes symptoms or treat HIV-related illnesses. Inmates with these diseases should tell their partner(s) and always use protection during sex.

## ***Can a person become infected again after being treated for an STD?***

Yes. Except for hepatitis A and hepatitis B, there are no vaccines against STDs. If two partners are infected, both must be treated. Without treatment, they can re infect each other.

## **What are the most common STDs?**

### **Chlamydia**

Chlamydia is the most common bacterial STD in the United States, but many people don't know about it. Most women with chlamydia have no symptoms. More than half of all men with chlamydia show no symptoms.

More cases of chlamydia are reported than any other STD. But, people know more about gonorrhea and syphilis than about chlamydia.

Chlamydia is a bacterial infection and is easily cured with antibiotic drugs.

Both men and women get chlamydia infections. Often there are no symptoms. Any symptoms that do appear will occur within 3 to 30 days after being exposed.

#### **Symptoms in men:**

- Itching at the head of the penis
- Greenish, clear discharge from the penis
- Pain or burning when urinating

#### **Symptoms in women:**

- Cramping similar to a menstrual cycle
- Vaginal discharge
- Abdominal or back pain



Without treatment, chlamydia can cause severe health problems.

**For men:**

- Epididymitis, an inflammation of the tube that carries sperm; may cause swelling in the testicles
- Prostatitis, a swelling of the prostate gland
- Sterility (not being able to produce children)

**For women:**

- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a serious infection of a woman's reproductive organs
- Cystitis, an inflammation of the bladder
- Cervicitis, an inflammation of the cervix, often causing a white discharge
- Infertility (not able to have children)

People are often infected with chlamydia and gonorrhea at the same time. So if a person is being treated for gonorrhea, they are often being treated for chlamydia also.

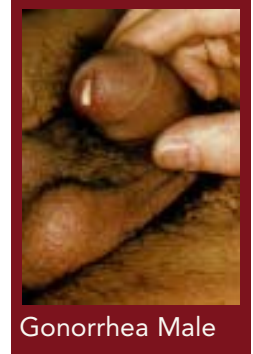
## Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea can be cured. It is a bacterial infection transmitted through oral, vaginal, or anal sex. It is also known as “the clap.”

Gonorrhea grows in the warm moist areas of the body. It often affects the urethra in men and the cervix in women. It can also affect the rectum if there was anal sex.

Most men will notice symptoms within 2 to 5 days after infection. Many women will have no symptoms. If they do have symptoms, they will occur within 10 days of infection.

Gonorrhea symptoms vary depending on the part of the body infected. For example, anal sex with an infected partner may cause rectal itching, discharge, or painful bowel movements. Or if a person had oral sex with an infected partner, a sore throat may occur. This is why it is very important for inmates to be truthful with health-care providers about the type of sex they have had.



Gonorrhea Male

### Symptoms in men:

- Discharge from the penis
- Burning or pain when urinating
- Urinating more often than normal

### Symptoms in women:

- Abnormal vaginal discharge
- Pain during sex
- Burning or pain when urinating
- Abdominal pain or abnormal vaginal bleeding

## *Hepatitis B*

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Viral infections, drugs and alcohol, and certain poisons usually cause hepatitis. It can cause jaundice (a yellowing of the skin), liver enlargement, abdominal pain, and fever.

Hepatitis B is caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). It can be passed from one person to another through the exchange of body fluids, such as blood, semen, breast milk, and possibly saliva.

A person may be exposed to HBV by having unprotected sex with an infected person. Someone who injects and shares syringes and other injection equipment may also be exposed. If a woman is infected with HBV when giving birth, her child may also be infected.

HBV is not spread through food or water or by casual contact.

You may be infected with HBV and not have any symptoms or feel ill. Common symptoms are feeling tired, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, and jaundice. With jaundice the whites of the eyes have a yellowish color. These symptoms can last from a few days to a few months.

Most people infected with HBV recover completely and become immune to the virus. When HBV is present for 6 months or more, a person may develop a chronic infection. People with chronic HBV continue to have symptoms and are infectious for a long time. Chronic HBV can damage the liver and may lead to cirrhosis.

Health-care providers can confirm HBV infection with a blood test. An ultrasound or liver biopsy may be needed if the provider thinks the infection may be chronic.

HBV can be prevented by getting vaccinated.

Inmates should talk to the medical staff about the HBV vaccine if they have been

- Sexually active, particularly if they have had one STD already;
- Injecting drugs; or
- Living with someone who has chronic HBV.

Inmates who have not been vaccinated for HBV and have been exposed to it should talk to the medical staff. They may be given treatment to prevent illness.

## Genital Herpes

Herpes is the term for infections caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). HSV Type 1 causes cold sores or fever blisters on the mouth or face. HSV Type 2 is known as genital herpes.

Genital herpes may exist on a woman's genitals and on the head of a man's penis. In women, the virus can spread into the vagina and infect the cervix. It can also spread to the testicles in men.

### Symptoms:

- Burning and itching of the genitals
- Tiny, red, painful blisters that turn a yellowish color and burst
- Painful ulcers that heal in about 10 days

Genital herpes is spread mostly through sexual contact with someone who is infected with HSV. Oral sex can also spread the disease.

Genital herpes can recur. This happens when the virus begins to multiply, and symptoms reappear, usually at the site of the original infection. A person with genital

herpes may have 3 or 4 recurrences per year. Episodes usually get milder over time.

Genital herpes has no cure. Once a person is infected, they will always be infected. The virus may remain inactive, and people may have no symptoms.

There are drugs to prevent herpes outbreaks and to treat outbreaks after they start. Some prescription drugs can help reduce the frequency, severity, and length of the outbreaks. Inmates who have herpes should talk with the medical staff about treatment options.

Having genital herpes may increase the chances of becoming infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). (HIV is the virus that causes AIDS). This is because when HIV is present in body fluids, such as blood and semen, it can enter the body through open sores caused by herpes.

Also, when both HIV and genital herpes are present, one virus may stimulate the other. Genital herpes in a person with AIDS can be severe and disfiguring.

## *Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)*

HIV attacks a person's immune system and leaves the body vulnerable to serious illnesses and cancers. HIV causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome or AIDS. AIDS is the most serious stage of HIV disease.

In those infected with HIV, the virus is present in blood, semen, vaginal discharge, and breast milk. These body fluids are the only ones known to carry HIV. Below are the ways in which HIV can spread from one person to another.

- By having unprotected sex with an infected person.
- By having sex with or sharing syringes, cotton, other drug equipment with injection drug users who have HIV.
- Through transfusions of infected blood or platelets. HIV infection via transfusion rarely occurs in the U.S. and other countries where donated blood is screened.
- Through birth to an infected woman. Babies may become infected before or during birth or through breast-feeding.
- Through health-care accidents. Health-care workers can be infected after being stuck with contaminated needles. They also have been infected by blood getting into an open cut, or into the eyes or nose.

A person can be infected with HIV and have no symptoms at all. On average, it takes about 7 to 9 years for symptoms to develop. The virus doesn't actually cause symptoms. Rather the symptoms result from other infections that occur because of the HIV. People with healthy immune systems seldom get these other kinds of infections.

Symptoms may include severe weight loss, fevers, headaches, night sweats, and fatigue. The symptoms may last for weeks or months at a time and require treatment. More serious illnesses may develop when the immune system weakens further.

A blood test can show if a person has HIV. HIV testing includes counseling and an explanation of the benefits of testing. Inmates should talk to the medical staff if they have had unprotected sex or shared injection drug equipment. Unprotected sex accounts for the majority of AIDS cases worldwide.

There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS. Treatments, such as antiretroviral drugs, can help once the virus weakens a person's immune system.

The presence of STDs increases a person's risk of getting HIV infection in several ways:

- Genital ulcers, which are caused by syphilis or herpes, cause breaks in the skin and the genitals. These breaks give HIV a way to enter the body.
- Other STDs, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea, increase the number of cells in body fluids. HIV can target these cells.

STD treatment can reduce a person's risk of spreading HIV to others. This is because treatment lowers the amount of HIV in the body. This reduces the risk of the infected person giving the disease to someone else.



## *Human Papillomavirus (HPV)*

Genital HPV infection is a viral skin disease which causes soft wart-like growths on the genitals. These are also known as genital warts. Genital warts can grow on the penis, vulva, urethra, vagina, cervix, and around the anus. They usually appear as soft, moist, pink or red swellings. They may be raised or flat, small or large. Only one or several may appear. Some cluster together forming a cauliflower-like shape.

If they are visible, a person will notice them within 3 weeks to 6 months after having sex with someone who has HPV infection. This delay makes it difficult to track the infection from person to person.

Most people infected with HPV have no visible signs or symptoms. However, they can still expose a sex partner to the virus. Men with HPV who have no symptoms are hard to diagnose and usually don't get treatment.

Inmates should talk with the medical staff if they think they have warts or other growths on their genitals.

The Pap smear is designed to find early signs of cancer in a woman's cervix. It also may show changes caused by HPV infection. All types of HPV can cause harmless Pap smear changes. There are 30 different types of genital HPV. Ten of these types of HPV may, in rare cases, lead to cancer.

Genital warts can be removed, but HPV infection cannot be cured. A doctor can freeze or burn small warts off. Laser surgery may be used in severe cases.

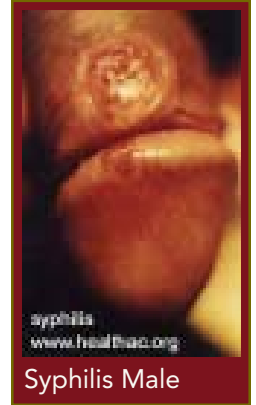
## Syphilis

Syphilis is an STD caused by a bacterium. It is a serious STD that can be debilitating. It can cause brain damage, loss of balance and vision, and heart disease.

Transmission occurs most often through sexual contact with an infected person.

Newborns can also become infected with syphilis. A pregnant woman infected with syphilis may have a stillborn baby, or the baby may die shortly after birth. Some babies are born infected with the disease. Such infants may have symptoms at birth, but most will develop symptoms between 2 weeks to 3 months after birth.

Open sores are infectious during the active stages of infection. Any contact with these sores and other infected tissues and body fluids must be avoided to prevent further infections.



Syphilis Hands

## Syphilis has three stages:

1. During the first stage, a painless sore may appear at the spot where the syphilis first entered the body. The sore, also called a chancre, may appear on or around the vagina, on the penis, or inside the mouth or anus. The sore may last 3-6 weeks and heal on its own. If the infection is not treated, the syphilis moves to the second stage.
2. The second stage occurs about 2 to 8 weeks after the original sore appeared. This is the most contagious stage. Symptoms include swollen lymph nodes, fever, and a rash on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet. At this stage, the bacteria have spread through the bloodstream and are at their greatest number. The second stage can last from a few weeks to a year. A latent stage often follows, which may last for years with the person having no symptoms.
3. Without proper treatment, the third stage may appear 3 to 10 years after the first and second stages occur. The bacteria may begin to damage body organs, including the brain, eyes, nerves, heart, liver, bones, and joints. It can lead to death. Late stage signs and symptoms include lack of muscle coordination, paralysis, numbness, blindness, and dementia.

## *A Few Words About Crabs and Scabies*

Crabs and scabies can be spread through sexual contact or by living with someone who is infected. Crabs are small insects that attach themselves tightly to pubic hair. They can be seen and easily diagnosed. Scabies are mites that make shallow burrows under the skin where they lay eggs. They are usually found between the fingers, around the genitals, and on the wrists or buttocks. Both cause a lot of itching.

All clothes, bed linens, and other fabrics that come in contact with crabs or scabies should be dry-cleaned or spin-washed and dried on the hot setting.

### ***What is my risk for contracting STDs at work?***

STDs are not spread through casual contact. You will not get STDs by talking with inmates. The medical staff will wear latex gloves when they examine an inmate. Latex gloves provide a barrier between the medical staff person and the inmate. Nonmedical staff members do not need to wear gloves or masks when just talking with inmates.

## *How can I prevent STD infection in the workplace?*

Following procedures is important to preventing infection and disease. It is most important to follow “universal precautions” when dealing with blood and body fluids. Universal precautions, those you take with all people, are most important when dealing with HIV-infected inmates. Because you cannot know for sure everyone who has HIV, you should take universal precautions routinely with all people.

Universal precautions include barrier protection, such as wearing gloves. You should wear gloves if there is a chance you could come in contact with a person’s blood or body fluids. Always wear gloves when you touch blood, body fluids, or breaks in the skin. You should also wear gloves when touching items or surfaces soiled with blood or body fluids. Gloves should be changed after every contact.

Another universal precaution is hand washing. Hands and other skin surfaces that come into contact with blood or other body fluids should be washed immediately and thoroughly. You should also wash your hands right after removing your gloves.

The following precautions should be taken to avoid injuries when disposing of or otherwise handling syringes or other sharp instruments. Gloves should be worn if there is any blood on the instrument. Syringes or other instruments with blood or body fluids should be placed in special trash containers that are marked for that purpose.

*Where can I get more information on STDs?*