

# teen talk

## Commonly Asked Questions About Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

### Teen Talk #2

### The Basics

#### What is an STD?

STD stands for "Sexually Transmitted Disease." These infections are passed from person to person during sexual activity (vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse). Some infections are curable, while others are not. It is estimated that more than 15 million new cases of STDs occur in the U.S. each year. Approximately one quarter (3.75 million) of the new cases occur among teenagers.

#### Who can get an STD?

Anyone who engages in sexual activity.

#### How do I know if I have an STD?

Since many STDs do not have any obvious symptoms, the only sure way to know is by having a medical exam and lab tests.

#### Do latex condoms protect you from getting an STD?

For sexually active people, the most effective strategy for reducing the risk of STDs and preventing HIV/AIDS is correct and consistent use of latex condoms. However, research shows that condoms may not provide as much protection against some STDs such as HPV (genital warts). Abstinence — not having sex — is the only 100% sure way to avoid an STD.

#### Who can I talk to?

A parent, teacher, school nurse, family doctor, clergyman or other responsible adult.



### "What are the Consequences of STDs?"

- ☒ **Gonorrhea and Chlamydia:** These STDs can cause serious health problems if not diagnosed and treated early:
  - ◆ **pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)** can damage fallopian tubes and make it difficult or impossible to have a baby (infertility);
  - ◆ **chronic pain in the lower abdomen;**
  - ◆ **tubal pregnancy** (also called ectopic pregnancy) — a condition where the pregnancy grows in the fallopian tube rather than the uterus. It is dangerous and requires immediate medical care.
- ☒ **HPV (genital warts):** Infection with some types of HPV has been linked to cancer of the cervix.
- ☒ **Syphilis:** This STD can cause blindness, heart disease, mental illness, joint damage, and death, if not diagnosed and treated early.
- ☒ **HIV/AIDS:** People who develop AIDS have severely weakened immune systems, which can lead to infections and death. STDs increase the risk of getting and transmitting HIV/AIDS. There is no cure for AIDS at this time.

*Males who are infected with STDs can transmit the infection to their partners, who, if pregnant, can transmit the infection to their babies!*



# Common Myths

**Myth:** If I don't have symptoms, that means I don't have an STD.

**Fact:** You can be infected with an STD and not know it. The only sure way to know if you have an STD is by having a medical exam and lab tests.

**Myth:** HIV/AIDS is the only STD that can't be cured.

**Fact:** STDs caused by viruses — genital herpes, genital warts, and HIV/AIDS — **cannot** be cured, although some medications may reduce the severity and/or delay the appearance of symptoms.

STDs caused by bacteria (like chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis) can usually be cured with antibiotics. If they are not treated early, serious long term problems, like pain and infertility, can develop.

## "What are the Symptoms of the common STDs?"

### Chlamydia

- 3/4 of women and 1/2 of men infected have no symptoms
- Discharge from the genital organs
- Burning with urination
- In women, lower abdominal and/or back pain; pain during intercourse

### Gonorrhea

- Discharge from the genital organs
- Burning or itching during urination
- Pelvic Pain
- Frequently no symptoms in females

### Syphilis

- Painless sores on genitals (10 days to 3 months after infection)
- Rash (3-6 weeks after sores appear)

### HIV/AIDS (*human immuno-deficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome*)

- No symptoms may appear for years until symptoms of AIDS occur

### HPV (*human papillomavirus*)

- Genital warts (sometimes warts are not visible)

### Genital Herpes

- Itching, burning, or pain in the genital area
- Blisters or sores (sores always heal but can re-appear throughout your life).

*If you experience any of these symptoms, go to a doctor or clinic as soon as possible!*

# Prevention

## How can I prevent an STD?

Abstinence (not having vaginal, anal, or oral sex) is the best and only 100 percent effective way to prevent getting a sexually transmitted disease. Only having sex with one person who has been tested for STDs is the next best way to prevent getting HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Teens who choose to have multiple sexual partners should always use latex condoms. Latex condoms can help protect against STDs and HIV/AIDS, but they do not provide perfect protection against all STDs. To those teens involved in high-risk behaviors and relationships and to those who may have relations with high-risk populations, the message is: the latex condom is the only contraception method that may protect against some STDs, including HIV/AIDS.

## If I am taking birth control pills, can I still get an STD?

YES! Birth control pills only protect against pregnancy, not STDs. People who take birth control pills or use hormonal injections, implants or patches to prevent pregnancy should also use latex condoms to reduce the risk for getting an STD, including HIV/AIDS.

## What should I do if I think I have an STD?

If you think you have been exposed to an STD, you should go to a clinic or doctor as soon as possible to be tested and treated. Health departments, which diagnose and treat STDs, are located in almost every county and city. They provide confidential information and will help answer any questions you may have about STDs.

## When should I have a checkup?

All sexually active teens should be seen by a health provider to be screened for STDs. Teens who have had sex with more than one person are at greater risk of getting an STD or HIV/AIDS.



## Where To Get More Information About STD Prevention

### CDC National STD and AIDS Hotline

(800) 227-8922

### Website

Division of STD Prevention, CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/dstdp.html>