

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." STDs are infections that are passed from person to person during sex (vaginal, oral, or anal). Some STDs are curable, while others are not. It is estimated that 19 million new cases of STDs occur in the United States every year. Millions of these new cases occur among teens.

Who can get an STD?

Anyone who has sex can get an STD.

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 being tested.

Do condoms protect me from getting an STD?

Condoms can reduce your risk of getting some STDs if used the right way every single time you have sex. But a condom protects only the area it covers. For example, HPV (the most common STD) can infect areas that are not covered. So you should not expect a condom to fully protect against all STDs.

What kind of condom provides the best protection from STDs?

Plastic condoms (made from polyurethane) provide some protection, but not as much as latex condoms. And "skin" condoms (made from animal membrane) don't protect you at all. Abstinence—not having sex of any kind—is the best protection. It's the only 100 percent sure way to avoid getting an STD.

Who can I talk to?

◆ Your parents or trusted adult:

Whether or not you are sexually active, you may want to talk to your parents or other trusted adults who can help you find medically accurate information about STDs, contraception, and condoms. Parents are a great source of information, and they can help you work through the many issues you are faced with when thinking about having sex.

◆ Your doctor or health care provider:

If you are sexually active, or are thinking about having sex, you may want to talk to your doctor or other health care provider about getting effective contraception, using a condom correctly every time you have sex, and being tested for STDs.

◆ Your partner (boyfriend, girlfriend):

You may want to talk to your partner—preferably before you have sex—about: your relationship, whether to have sex or to wait, your sexual and disease histories, and protecting yourselves by using a condom correctly every time you have sex. Even if you and your partner have already had sex, these issues are important to discuss.



What are the symptoms of common STDs?

Chlamydia

- ◆ Discharge from the genitals.
- ◆ Burning with urination.
- ◆ In females, lower abdominal and/or back pain, and pain during sex.
- ◆ 3 out of 4 infected females and 1 in 2 infected males have no symptoms.

Gonorrhea

- ◆ Discharge from the genitals.
- ◆ Burning or itching during urination.
- ◆ Pelvic pain.
- ◆ Sore throat.
- ◆ Anal discharge and itching.
- ◆ Females frequently have no symptoms.

Syphilis

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

HIV/AIDS

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

HPV

- ◆ Genital warts (sometimes warts are not visible).
- ◆ Most people with HPV have symptoms. That includes people infected with the types of HPV linked to cervical cancer.

Genital Herpes

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

If you experience any of these symptoms, go to a doctor or clinic as soon as possible to be tested and treated!

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 being tested.

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 can develop, like pain and infertility.

What can happen if I get an STD?

- ◆ **Gonorrhea and chlamydia:** In females, these two STDs can cause the following 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, a problem called "infertility."
 - ◆ Constant pain in the lower abdomen.
 - ◆ Tubal pregnancy, also called ectopic pregnancy, a condition in which the pregnancy grows in the fallopian tube instead of in the uterus. This problem is dangerous and requires immediate medical care.
- ◆ **HPV:** Some types can cause genital warts, and other types can cause cervical cancer.
- ◆ **Syphilis:** This STD can cause blindness, heart disease, mental illness, joint damage, and death, if not diagnosed and treated early.
- ◆ **HIV:** Certain STDs, like syphilis and herpes, can increase the risk of getting and spreading HIV.

Males and females who are infected with STDs can spread the infection to their partners. If pregnant, women can then spread the infection to their babies.

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Prevention

How can I prevent getting an STD?
Abstinence (not having sex, including vaginal, oral, and anal sex) is the best and only 100 percent effective way to prevent getting an STD. Even if you have had sex, returning to abstinence is the best way to protect yourself. For sexually active people, the next best way to prevent infection is to **USE LATEX CONDOMS** the right way every single time you have sex. Latex condoms can help protect against some STDs including HIV, but they don't provide perfect protection.

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, patches, implants, or rings to prevent pregnancy should also use latex or plastic condoms.

What should I do if I think I might 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 have about STDs.

Should I have a checkup?

Anyone who is sexually active should have routine checkups that include tests for STDs. The more partners you have, the greater your risk of exposure to an STD.



Where can I get more information?

Call CDC's National Prevention Information Network (NPIN) at 1-800-458-5231 or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/std/>.

For condom use, also visit:

<http://www.fda.gov/oashi/aids/condom.html>

<http://www.ihs.gov/NonMedicalPrograms/NC4/pe/documents/Condom%20sense.pdf>