

## WHAT ARE SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)?

STDs are infections that can be transferred from one person to another through any type of sexual contact. Forms of sexual contact include vaginal sex, anal sex, oral sex, or mutual masturbation.

## WOMEN'S SUSCEPTIBILITY TO STDs

Women are biologically more vulnerable to STDs than are men due to their anatomy. The vagina is covered by a thin layer of skin that easily allows viruses and bacteria to pass through and cause infections. It is a warm and moist environment, which encourages bacteria to grow.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Most STDs do not cause specific symptoms. Visible manifestation vary significantly from person to person. Without noticeable signs of an STD, infections go untreated, and can result in long-lasting, irreversible effects.

## GET TESTED

Many STDs do not show symptoms for a long time, but they can still be harmful and passed on during sex. Getting tested for STDs is the only way for a sexually active person to be sure of their STD status and stop the spread of STDs among their sexual partners and beyond.



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HEALTHY LIVING PROGRAM

# Women AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)

## Common STDs in Women

### GONORRHEA

**Symptoms:** Thick yellow/gray discharge from the vagina, burning/pain during urination or bowel movement, abnormal bleeding between periods, abdominal pain.

**Treatment:** Can be treated with antibiotics

**If Untreated:** Untreated gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Some of the complications of PID are formation of scar tissue that blocks fallopian tubes, ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the womb), infertility (inability to get pregnant) and long-term pelvic/abdominal pain.

### CHLAMYDIA

**Symptoms:** Discharge from the vagina, bleeding between menstrual periods, burning or pain when urinating, more frequent urination.

**Treatment:** Easily cured with a 7-day course of antibiotics.

**If Untreated:** Damage to your reproductive system and can lead to long-term pelvic pain, inability to get pregnant, and potentially deadly ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus).

### SYPHILIS

**Symptoms:** divided into stages (primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary) - sores, skin rash, swollen lymph nodes, and fever.

**Treatment:** A single injection or penicillin will cure a person who has primary, secondary, or early latent syphilis. Three doses of penicillin weekly is recommended for individuals with latent syphilis or latent syphilis of unknown durations.

**If Untreated:** Can spread to the brain and nervous system (neurosyphilis) - headache, difficulty coordinating muscle movements, and paralysis - or to the eye (ocular syphilis) - changes in your vision and even blindness.

### GENITAL HERPES

**Symptoms:** small, painful blisters on the sex organs or mouth, itching or burning before the blisters appear, flu-like symptoms. Blisters last 1-3 weeks, and can be episodic.

**Treatment:** Herpes are only treatable, not curable. Antiviral medications can prevent or shorten outbreaks during the period of time medication is taken.

**If Untreated:** Painful genitals.

### HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)

**Symptoms:** Small bumpy warts on the genitals or anus, itching or burning around genitals.

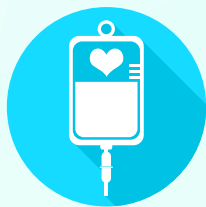
**Treatment:** There is no cure for HPV and warts. Treatment such as the loop electrical excision procedure, freezing and cervical conization are used for removing warts, abnormal cells and tissue.

**If Untreated:** Genital warts may appear as a small bump or groups of bumps in the genital area. Certain strains of HPV can lead to cancer if untreated. This includes cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, or anus.

**Vaccination:** The HPV vaccine can protect males and females against diseases (including certain strains of cancer) caused by HPV when given in the recommended age groups. CDC recommends females get the vaccine before becoming sexually active. Those who are sexually active may also benefit from vaccination.

## Zika and Women's Health

Zika virus is spread to people through the bite of an infected mosquito, from mother to child, and can be sexually transmitted from a person who has Zika to his or her sex partners. Many people infected with Zika will have no symptoms or mild symptoms that last several days. Zika infection during pregnancy can cause fetal brain defects. The best way to protect yourself from mosquito bites through the use of insect repellent, wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants and using condoms consistently.



## How Can You Prevent STDs?

### Abstinence

Abstinence is effective in preventing pregnancy and STDs. Abstaining from sex means not having any type of sex at all. All people have the right to choose if and when to have sex.

### Monogamy

Monogamy means only having sex with one person who only has sex with you. Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner is one of the most reliable ways to avoid STDs.

### Condoms

Partners should talk about and negotiate safer sex, including use of condoms (male and female condoms), flavored condoms, and dental dams.

### Open communication

It is important that partners discuss their sexual histories and STDs before having sex.

## Talking to your Partner about STDs

Having a conversation about sex with your partner is important. It is crucial to get tested before you have sex with a new partner as not everyone with an STD knows they're infected.

If you've been diagnosed with an STD, tell your partner so you can both make informed decisions about risk. Talking about sex openly creates relationships that are more fun and satisfying.

### Before you talk:

- Know the facts about STDs
- Know what you want from the conversation
- If you think it will be hard to talk, figure out why.
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