

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

About STIs

Sexually transmitted infections (STI) are infections most often spread from person to person through sexual contact. These infections cause sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). There are more than 30 types of bacteria, viruses, or parasites that cause STIs.

Some of the more common infections are:

- Chancroid
- Chlamydia
- Genital herpes
- Gonorrhea
- Hepatitis
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- Human papilloma virus (HPV or genital warts)
- Syphilis
- Trichomoniasis

How STIs happen

STIs are caused by germs that live on the skin or in body fluids like semen, vaginal fluid, or blood.

These germs can enter the body through the vagina, mouth, anus, and open sores or cuts. Some germs, like the ones that cause herpes or genital warts, infect a person through the skin of the genitals.

The germs pass from an infected person through contact with skin, blood, or body fluids. Sexual contact (oral, vaginal, anal) with an infected person is the most common way to become infected.

Facts about STIs

- STIs affect both men and women, but health problems from STIs tend to happen more often and be worse for women than men.
- Unprotected anal sex puts women at even greater risk of getting STIs than unprotected vaginal sex.
- In women, some STIs can spread and cause other serious problems.
- Most STIs can be treated. Some can be cured, but others cause life long disease.
- STIs can be spread even if there are no signs of infection. It can be hard to tell if someone has an STI.

- A pregnant or breastfeeding woman who is infected can pass the infection to her baby.
- STIs are not spread through casual contact, or by sitting on toilet seats, or by being in swimming pools.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.

Signs of STIs

Signs may develop in a few days or they may not occur for months. Signs may not be noticed or there may be none. Often signs in women are the same as a yeast infection or urinary tract infection.

Common signs may include:

- Burning with urination
- Vaginal discharge
- Abdominal pain
- Blisters or open sores on genitals
- Warts
- Rash
- Bleeding between periods

Getting tested is the only way to be sure you are treated for the right infection.

Testing

You can be tested for STIs by your doctor or at your local health department.

You can usually find a list of locations for nearby clinics and testing sites online. If you are not able to find any, call your local health department for places.

Many places offer free or low-cost testing.

Treatment

Medicine is used to treat most STIs. Bacterial infections, such as syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhea, are 90% cured when all antibiotics are taken as directed. Viral infections, such as herpes and HIV, cannot be cured.

Treatment and medicine can be used to help relieve the signs and keep the disease from becoming worse.

If you are being treated for an STI, follow the instructions for your treatment and avoid sexual contact until you and your partner have been treated.

What happens if I don't get treated?

There are a number of problems that could happen if you do not get treated or do not finish your treatment. These may include:

- Increased chance for HIV infection
- Genital cancer
- Infertility or sterility
- Chronic illness such as hepatitis, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), cancer or AIDS
- Pregnancy problems, such as miscarriages
- The mother can give an STI to her baby before or during childbirth
- Heart problems
- Problems affecting the brain and nerves, such as confusion, problems walking or blindness
- Death

STI Prevention

There are some things you can do to limit your chances of getting an STI, such as:

- Don't have sex.
- Have only 1 sexual partner.
- Use condoms correctly each and every time you have intercourse.
- Talk with your partner about STIs before having sex.
- Have a pelvic exam and have STI testing every year if you are sexually active.
- Avoid alcohol or drug use that could cause you to take risks.