

Factsheet: STD's

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are diseases that are mainly passed from one person to another during sex. There are at least 25 different sexually transmitted diseases with a range of different symptoms. These diseases may be spread through vaginal, anal and oral sex.

Most sexually transmitted diseases will only affect you if you have sexual contact with someone who has an STD. However there are some infections, for example scabies, which are referred to as STDs because they are most commonly transmitted sexually, but which can also be passed on in other ways.

Sexually transmitted infection (STI) is another name for sexually transmitted disease (STD). The name STI is often preferred because there are a few STDs, such as chlamydia, that can infect a person without causing any actual disease (i.e. unpleasant symptoms). Someone without symptoms may not think of themselves as having a disease, but they may still have an infection that needs treating.

Here are some of the most common STD's:

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is one of the most commonly reported bacterial sexually transmitted diseases. If left untreated, long-term infection can lead to fertility problems in women. Chlamydia is transmitted through genital contact and/or sexual intercourse with someone already infected.

(Genital) herpes

Herpes is caused by two strains of the herpes simplex virus, type 1 (HSV-1) and type 2 (HSV-2). HSV-2 is more common and usually manifests itself in the genital and anal area, whereas HSV-1 is more likely to affect the mouth and lips in the form of cold sores. On a global scale, HSV-2 is a very common STD.

Genital warts

Genital warts can appear on the skin anywhere in the genital area as small whitish or flesh-coloured bumps, or larger, fleshy, cauliflower-like lumps. They are unlikely to cause pain but may itch and can be difficult to spot. Often there are no other symptoms

Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmitted infection that can infect the urethra, cervix, rectum, anus and throat. Symptoms of gonorrhoea usually appear between 1 and 14 days after exposure, but it is possible to have no symptoms. Men are more likely to notice symptoms than women.

Hepatitis A, hepatitis B, hepatitis C

Hepatitis refers to viral infections that cause inflammation of the liver. Several different types of hepatitis virus exist with hepatitis A, B and C being the most common. Hepatitis can occur following excessive and prolonged consumption of alcohol or the use of certain medicines and drugs, but it is most commonly caused by a virus, which can be transmitted sexually.

Most sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including herpes simplex 2 (HSV-2), syphilis, gonorrhoea, and chlamydia, are known to increase the risk of HIV infection in HIV-negative persons. STIs also lead to increased shedding of HIV from the genitals of people living with HIV and in many cases an increase in viral load in the blood, increasing the risk of transmitting HIV to others and potentially having a detrimental effect on overall health.

If you think you might have been exposed to an STD then you should go to see a doctor. Many sexually transmitted diseases can be easily cured, but if left untreated, they may cause unpleasant symptoms, could lead to long-term damage such as infertility and increase the risk of sexual transmission of HIV. It is important that anyone diagnosed with an STD informs everyone they have had sex with within the past year (or everyone following the partner they believe may have infected them) so that they can also be tested and treated.

There are many websites offering online information and advice. Here are just a few examples:

<http://yourstdhelp.com/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/STD/>

<http://www.avert.org/std.htm>

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/stds-hiv-safer-sex-101.htm>

