Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

A sexually transmitted disease is a disease that is contracted through sexual exposure. It is possible that if have been sexually active at all, you could be at risk of having an STD. Below is more information about these diseases.

How long have STDs been around?

Before 1980 only the STDs called syphilis and gonorrhea were common. Since 1980 there are at least 25 new STDs that have been identified, including HIV/AIDS. Source: Eng TR, Butler WT, eds. The Hidden Epidemic - Confronting Sexually Transmitted Disease. Institute of Medicine. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1997.

Is there really that big of a risk for me to get an STD?

STDs accounted for 87 percent of all cases among the top ten most frequently reported infections in the U.S. during 1997. Five of the top 10 reportable infectious disease in 1997 were either exclusively or largely transmitted during sex, including the top four (Chlamydia, gonorrhea, AIDS, and syphilis). Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Summary of Notifiable Disease, US 1998. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 1999;47(53):1-93.

How many people are infected with an STD?

- In the United States it is estimated that there are more than 68 million current STDs.
- Each year 15.3 million new STD infections occur, including over 3 million infections in teens.

Are teens more at risk for STDs?

- Teen girls have a higher rate of Chlamydia, a disease that is a common cause of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can lead to infertility in older women.
- At least 10 percent of all sexually active teens are infected with this disease.

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What is HPV?

- Human papilloma virus (HPV) is an STD that causes genital warts.
- HPV also causes more than 90 percent of all cervical cancer. Cervical cancer takes the lives of about 5,000 American women yearly, and condoms provide almost no protection against HPV.
- It is estimated 5.5 million new infections occur each year with at least 20 million people currently infected.


What age group is at greatest risk for acquiring an STD?

Adolescents and young adults (15-24) are the age groups at the greatest risk for acquiring an STD. Approximately 2/3 of all people who get an STD are under 25. The Centers for Disease Control states that adolescents and young adults are at greater risk for many reasons, including:

- They may have less immunity (ability to fight a disease) than adults
- They may be more likely to have more than one sex partners
- They may be more likely to engage in unprotected intercourse
- They may select partners at higher risk
- Age at start of sexual activity has decreased while age at first marriage has increased, resulting in more non- marital sexual experience.


What about HIV /AIDS? Am I at risk?

- An estimated 25% of new HIV infections are found in people under age 22.
- An estimated 50% of all new HIV infections occur among people under 25, with the majority being infected by sexual contact with a person carrying the disease.


Which STDs are stopped by using condoms?

- Condoms provide the best (though not complete) protection against HIV and gonorrhea.
- They are less effective protecting against herpes type 2, trichomonas and Chlamydia.
- Condoms provide little protection against bacterial vaginosis and HPV (the most common STD).


Can STDs be cured?

While medical science has made great advances, the growth of STD infections continue to spread. Chlamydia and gonorrhea can be "cured" with antibiotics but can leave scars, which often require future treatment and may cause infertility. And certain strains of gonorrhea are becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics.

Viral STDs pose a major problem because no medical cure has been found for any virus—not even the common cold! This means if a person becomes infected with a viral STD (such as herpes, HPV, or HIV) there is no cure. A vaccine for herpes has been rumored for years, but has not yet been produced. Antiviral drugs
reduce the number of outbreaks a person with herpes experiences, they cannot eliminate the outbreaks entirely.

A cure or vaccine for the HIV virus is probably years away. We do know, however, that even if vaccines or cures for these infections were available today—the STD problem would not be solved.

**For more information on STDs visit this site: [www.medinstitute.org](http://www.medinstitute.org)**

Source: Medical Institute of Sexual Health, "Frequently Asked Questions"