

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infections that are spread by sexual contact with someone who has an STD. STDs are mostly spread through vaginal, anal, or oral sex, and genital touching.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)


There are about 19 million new STD infections each year in the United States. There are over 20 types of STDs. STDs may be caused by bacteria, parasites, or viruses. STD infection may show a range of signs, or no signs at all. Sometimes people have an STD and don't know it. The only way to know if you have an STD is by a medical exam and testing by your health care provider.

Common STDs caused by bacteria that can be treated and cured with antibiotics include:

- ◆ Chlamydia.
- ◆ Gonorrhea.
- ◆ Syphilis.

Common STDs caused by viruses that can be controlled with treatment include:

- ◆ Hepatitis.
- ◆ Herpes.
- ◆ HIV.
- ◆ HPV.



If you have an STD, tell current and recent sex partners of the infection.

How do you know if you have an STD?

Your health care provider can examine and test you for STDs. Some women are at a higher risk for STDs. They should have regular exams and testing. Higher risk women include those who:

- ◆ Have had a previous STD.
- ◆ Have new or multiple sexual partners.
- ◆ Use condoms only some of the time.
- ◆ Have sex for drugs or money.
- ◆ Use needles for illegal drugs.



Using condoms or not having sex are the best options to protect yourself from STDs.

How can women avoid STDs?

- ◆ Avoid sexual contact.
 - Including vaginal, anal, or oral sex, or genital touching.
 - This is the only way to be absolutely sure of avoiding STDs.
- ◆ Have safer sex:
 - Reduce the number of sexual partners.
 - Use barriers, including:
 - Male condom.
 - Female condom.
 - Condoms, when used correctly, can reduce the risk of getting an STD. Each time you have sex use a condom (male or female type):
 - Before vaginal sex.
 - Before anal sex.
 - Before oral sex.
 - Dental dam.
 - Plastic wrap, if other barriers are not available.
 - Have sex with only one partner who does not have sex with others and does not have an STD.



For more information, see *Safer Sex* on page 77.

- ◆ Know that washing the vagina or douching after sex will not prevent it.
 - The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommend that women do not douche.
 - Douching can change the balance of germs and acidity in a healthy vagina.
 - Any changes in that balance can cause an over growth of bad bacteria. This can lead to a yeast infection or bacterial vaginosis.
 - If you have a vaginal infection, douching can push infection-causing bacteria up into the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. This can cause more serious problems.

What about pregnancy?

Some STDs can also be passed on to the baby during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.

It is important for all pregnant women to be tested for STDs. Treatment of STDs can prevent the effects of the STD on the baby. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and have an STD, you should talk to your health care provider about the risk of passing the STD to your baby.

Some STDs can cause:

- ◆ Early birth.
- ◆ Low birth weights.
- ◆ Other severe problems in the newborn baby.

For more on STDs see:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

STD Prevention Today

www.cdcnpin.org/scripts/std/prevent.asp

Condom Fact Sheet In Brief

www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/brief.html

Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) – CDC Fact Sheet

www.cdc.gov/std/pid/stdfact-pid.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health:

Sexually transmitted infections (STI) fact sheet

www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/sexually-transmitted-infections.cfm

HIV/AIDS: Preventing HIV infection

www.womenshealth.gov/hiv/prevention/

Douching fact sheet

www.womenshealth.gov/faq/douching.cfm