

# Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD)

## What is a sexually transmitted disease?

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD) are infections you can get from sexual activity, including vaginal intercourse, anal sex, oral sex, or skin-to-skin contact.

STDs can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites. Most STD germs need to live in warm, moist areas – that's why they infect the mouth, rectum and sex organs (vagina, vulva, penis, and testes). Some STD germs lead to infections that can affect your whole body.

### STDs are serious illnesses that require treatment.

- STDs affect both men and women of all backgrounds and economic levels. About 18.9 million *new* cases of STDs (not including HIV) occur each year in the U.S. More than half of all people in the U.S. will be infected with an STD at some point in their lifetime.
- 1 out of 4 sexually active teens in the United States becomes infected with an STD each year. By age 25, half of all sexually active young adults will get an STD.



## What are the most common STDs?

### ■ Bacterial

Chlamydia  
Gonorrhea  
Syphilis

### ■ Parasitic

Trichomoniasis

### ■ Viral

Hepatitis B  
Herpes [Herpes simplex virus (HSV2)]  
HIV [Human immunodeficiency virus]

- Causes AIDS

HPV [Human papilloma virus]

- Causes genital warts; linked to cervical cancer

Bacterial STDs (caused by bacteria) and parasitic STDs (caused by parasites) can be cured.  
Viral STDs (caused by viruses) can be treated, but there is currently NO CURE for viral STDs.

## How can I protect myself from getting an STD?

The only 100% sure way to protect yourself from STDs is to not have sex. It only takes one sexual contact with someone who has an STD to catch it.

### IF YOU ARE HAVING SEX:

- Use a **latex condom** every time you have sex (even if using hormonal birth control).
- Have **regular checkups** for STDs even if you have no symptoms. Tell your doctor that you are sexually active.
- Before you have sex with a **new partner**, ask whether they have been tested for STDs.
- Limit your **number of sexual partners**. The more partners you have, the more likely you are to catch an STD.
- Practice **monogamy**. This means having sex with only one person. That person must also have sex with only you to reduce your risk.
- **Choose your sex partners** with care. Don't have sex with someone you think may have an STD.
- Don't use **alcohol or drugs** before you have sex. You may be less likely to use a condom if you are drunk or high.
- **Learn** about STDs so you can protect yourself.



## How will I know if I have an STD?

Many women and men who have an STD **do not have any symptoms**. If you do have symptoms, they may include one or more of the following:

- Bumps, sores, or warts near the mouth, anus, penis or vagina
- Swelling or redness near the penis or vagina
- Skin rash
- Painful urination
- Weight loss, loose stools, or night sweats
- Aches, pains, fever, and chills
- Yellowing of the skin (jaundice)
- Discharge from the penis or vagina (vaginal discharge may have an odor)
- Bleeding from the vagina other than during a monthly period
- Painful sex
- Severe itching near the penis or vagina

## How will I know if my partner has an STD?

Ask. You can't tell if someone has an STD just by looking, so talk to your partner before having any sexual contact to find out if they are at risk for having an STD. Ask your partner to make an appointment for STD testing so you can both be sure.



## How can I get tested for STDs?

Make an appointment with your healthcare provider for STD testing. There is not one single procedure to test for all STIs at once – you will need several types of tests: a blood test, a urine test, a sample of cells from the cervix (women) or urethra (men), and a visual exam. Women who are sexually active also get a Pap smear every year to test for abnormal cells on the cervix.

## How are STDs treated?

Many STDs can be successfully treated with antibiotics to kill the germs that are causing the infection. However, if you have a viral STD, your healthcare provider will be able to treat your symptoms, but there is no cure. You will still have the STD and may pass it on to sexual partners.

### FOR ANYONE DIAGNOSED WITH AN STD:

- Get treated right away to prevent more serious health problems for yourself and to reduce the risk of transmitting the STD to a sex partner
- Notify all recent sex partners and urge them to get tested for STDs
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions and complete the full course of the medicine prescribed
- Avoid all sexual activity while being treated for an STD

## What happens if I have an STD and don't get treated?

The consequences of untreated STDs can be serious, especially for women. They include pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, tubal pregnancy, chronic pain, cervical cancer, and other complications.



### For more information:

- **National CDC Information Hotline: 1-800-232-4636** [24 hours a day (English and Spanish)]  
Provides information about all topics related to HIV/AIDS and other STDs.

SOURCE: [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com), [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org), [www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)