

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Six common sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) and their symptoms are described below. Below is a quick summary of these STD's.

1 Chlamydia

A bacterial infection that affects 4 million Americans each year.

It is very often silent in women. You can have chlamydia and not know it. When it does have symptoms, they can include a pus-like vaginal discharge, burning during urination, and pain during sex. If it is not treated, chlamydia can lead to PID*.

2 Gonorrhea

Also a bacterial infection you get through sex. About 1.3 million Americans are affected each year.

Symptoms are not always present, but when they do occur, they can include abnormal vaginal discharge, discomfort when urinating, and painful menstruation. Like chlamydia, gonorrhea can lead to PID*.

3 Syphilis

An STD that affects about 134,000 Americans each year.

Syphilis causes a hard painless sore in the affected area. Without treatment, a rash will develop. Later, heart disease, blindness, and paralysis may occur. Death can result if syphilis remains untreated.

4 Genital Warts

Genital warts are soft growths in or around the vaginal area caused by a virus called human papilloma virus (HPV). About one million Americans become infected with HPV each year. HPV can lead to cancer of the cervix if not closely monitored.

5 Herpes

Also is a viral infection. Up to 500,000 Americans contract herpes each year. Herpes generally causes painful blisters to appear on the affected area for a short period of time. The blisters can reappear at later times. During the first outbreak, flu-like symptoms may also occur.

Diagnosis: Blood tests are often performed in a person who believes he or she may have been exposed to herpes virus in the past, but has no visible ulcers.

Blood test can detect the antibodies HSV-1 and HSV-2. If one has a positive test for antibodies this indicates that the person was infected with the virus at some time in the past, although it is usually not possible to know when or from whom the virus was transmitted. The antibody response takes time. The results of the test may be negative during the first episode of genital herpes. Within three to four months after an initial episode, HSV antibodies can usually

be detected. The antibody test remains positive for life.

It is possible for a person to have HSV antibodies indicating past infection even if they have no memory or history of herpes ulcers or blisters.

Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is a very sensitive test for identifying the herpes virus and cells and secretions for the urinary and genital tract. PCR test is more sensitive than the culture test, but is not routinely used due to its higher cost.

6 Hepatitis B

A virus that more than 300,000 Americans contract each year. In addition, more than one million people in the US carry the virus, which means they do not have symptoms of the disease, but they can pass it on to somebody else.

More on Hepatitis B: When symptoms occur, they can include fatigue, mild fever, muscle and joint aches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, and changes in the color of urine and feces. Hepatitis B can lead to cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, and death. However, you should know that hepatitis B is the only STD that can be prevented with a vaccine.

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What You Should Know About Pelvic Inflammatory Disease

*Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) is a serious infection of the fallopian tubes and lining of the uterus. It can occur when certain sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), like chlamydia and gonorrhea, are not treated promptly. The infections that can lead to PID are described above. It is important to know that PID does not always cause symptoms. When PID does cause symptoms, they can include mild lower abdominal pain, irregular bleeding, vaginal discharge, and pain while urinating. If PID is not treated by a doctor, it can cause a woman to become infertile or it can cause an ectopic (tubal) pregnancy.

A Note About HIV & AIDS

AIDS gets a lot of attention these days because there is no cure for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS. Although some treatments may slow the course of the disease, AIDS eventually results in death.

You can be infected with HIV through vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, or other contact with the body fluids of somebody who already has HIV (for example, through oral sex or contact with blood).

If you have herpes or syphilis, the presence of an open sore can increase your risk of HIV infection if you have sex with someone who has HIV. Some people do not develop

symptoms of AIDS until as many as ten years after their contact with the virus. So, you can't tell if someone you are having sex with is infected with HIV. For this reason, it is important to talk to your doctor about ways to reduce your risk. If you are sexually active (having sex with more than one partner within the last six months), it is important to be tested regularly for HIV.

Although there is no cure yet, there are a number of treatments available, even if you do not have any symptoms of AIDS.

If you know you are infected, you need to talk to your doctor about how to avoid infecting anyone else.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

HPV is believed to cause cancer of the genital tract and cervix. Latex condoms, which can help to prevent the transfer of HIV, are not one hundred percent effective in stopping HPV. Both sexual partners must be free of HPV, or infections will continue to occur.

WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

Because so many sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) do not cause symptoms, it is important to see your doctor and ask for an STD check-up at least once a year, or whenever you have a new partner, even if you feel okay or do not believe you are at risk.

Be sure not to douche during the 48 hours before your appointment. If you douche, the doctor will not be able to examine your natural vaginal secretions.

In addition, you should see your doctor for these reasons:

- If you think you have an infection, either because you have symptoms or your partner has symptoms.
- Before starting a sexual relationship with a new partner, even if you and your partner do not have symptoms.
- If you or your partner have other sex partners, you should see your doctor every three months.
- It is a must that you follow-up with your doctor if you are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease.