

Sexually Transmitted Diseases Information for Teens

Who gets STDs?

There are a few things that increase the chances that a teenager will get a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Of course, the best way to avoid STDs is to not have sex!!!

- If you have multiple sex partners, your chance of getting a STD is higher.
- If you have sex while using alcohol or drugs, your chance of getting a STD is higher
- If you do not use a condom or use it wrong, your chance of getting a STD is higher

How do you get STDs?

STDs are infections you catch by having *any* kind of sex with someone who has a STD. You will probably not be able to tell if your partner has a STD by looking – often there are no sores or signs visible from the outside. Some STDs can be cured with medication; some cannot and are part of your life forever. Some can cause serious problems with your health, even death.

Some teens think that if they have only oral sex, they are safe and cannot get a STD. This is **WRONG!** Oral sex can transmit STDs too.

Birth control pills do not prevent STDs. They only decrease the chance of pregnancy. You still must protect yourself and reduce the chance of STDs by avoiding multiple partners, by not having sex when using drugs or alcohol, and by using a condom correctly with a spermicide *every time*. (A spermicide is a product to kill sperm; it may also kill some STD germs. Use a spermicide that is sold separately from the condom. It can be a foam, cream, or gel.)

What are the STDs?

There are many STDs. This is a summary of the most common ones. If you have questions about any STD, ask your doctor or nurse practitioner!

- **Bacterial vaginosis** – an infection of the vagina with bacteria germs that cause a smelly discharge, itch, soreness. Treated with antibiotics.
- **Chlamydia**- one of the most common STDs in teens, both boys and girls. There may not be symptoms when you are infected, so you should be tested if you are sexually active. Chlamydia may cause discharge from the vagina or the penis. It can infect other areas of the body, such as the eyes. It is treated with antibiotics.
- **Epididymitis** – This is an infection of the tubes that transport sperm in boys. It causes pain in the scrotum. It is treated with antibiotics.

- **Genital herpes-** This is a virus that causes blisters and sores on the genitals of boys and girls. It can also be spread to the mouth. The sores are painful and can break out again anytime in the future. There is no cure for herpes. Some medicines may help the sores to heal faster, but they can't stop herpes from coming back and they don't stop it from spreading to others. If you have herpes, your future babies can get very sick if you have an outbreak around the time you give birth.
- **Genital warts** – These are lumps on the skin of boys or girls, or inside the vagina. They are caused by viruses and have no cure. Some types of genital warts are linked to cancer. There are medicines to try to decrease the warts, but they don't always work. HPV vaccine decreases the chances of getting genital warts and cancer.
- **Gonorrhea** – This is an infection caused by a bacteria germ. Gonorrhea can cause pain and discharge from the vagina or penis. It can also spread to other parts of your body. Gonorrhea is treated with antibiotics.
- **HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus**, the cause of AIDS (**Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome**). Everyone knows that AIDS is serious! Early on, people infected with HIV appear normal. Illegal drug use makes AIDS more likely since sharing needles also spreads AIDS. There is no cure for AIDS, and infected patients often take multiple medicines to try to control it. See our handout about AIDS.
- **Pubic lice (crabs)** – these are bugs that live in the hair around your genital area. When they bite, they cause pain and itch. They can be treated with medicines to kill the bugs.
- **Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)** – This is a serious infection of the girl's reproductive system. Bacteria spread from the vagina to the uterus (womb) and fallopian tubes. Girls with PID have pain in the lower abdomen or pain while having sex; they often have fever and vaginal discharge. There can be more than one bacteria causing PID. Strong medicines are needed to treat PID, and sometimes hospitalization is needed. PID can cause problems with future fertility – that is, girls who had PID may have trouble getting pregnant in the future.
- **Scabies** – this is a bug that lives under the skin. It causes severe itching. Scabies can be a STD or can be transmitted to other areas of the body by non-sexual contact. It is treated with medicines to kill the bugs.
- **Syphilis** - A serious bacterial infection. May cause extremely contagious painless genital sores that will heal without treatment, but the germ will still be in your body. Syphilis can spread throughout your body and permanently damage many organs including your brain.
- **Trichomoniasis** – An infection with a “protozoan” germ. May cause itch, vaginal discharge, discharge from the penis, or burning urination. Many infected people do not have symptoms. Treatment is with antibiotics.

- **Yeast infection** – A red, irritated, itchy infection of the skin and vagina. Treated with medicine to kill yeast. Yeast infections can occur in teens who do not have sex too, but sex can spread the infection.

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