

Protecting Yourself From STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are spread person-to-person. Each time you have unprotected sex with someone, you are having sex with everyone they've had sex with. Each sexual contact with an infected person increases your risk of becoming infected.

STDs don't discriminate with regard to age, race or sexual orientation. They are equal opportunity diseases caused by viruses or bacteria. They live in blood, semen and vaginal secretions.

You can protect yourself from STDs — or at least significantly lower your chance of getting one — by:

- Abstinence (not having sex)
- Proper use of condoms
- Knowing your partner (and his or her sexual history)

If you are having sex — and that includes oral sex, vaginal sex or anal sex — you could be infected with chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, human papilloma virus, herpes, hepatitis B or HIV/AIDS. In some instances, you can “catch” an STD by skin-to-skin contact with an infected person or contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids.

The chart below lists the signs and symptoms of the most common STDs, how you can get each, how each is treated, whether it can be cured and the possible complications that could come from being infected with a particular STD.

If you have any signs of an STD, call your health care provider immediately.

STD	Signs/Symptoms	Transmission	Treatment	Is It Curable?	Complications
CHLAMYDIA also called “The Silent Epidemic”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discharge from vagina, penis or rectum • Pain during urination • Sore throat • Or, no symptoms 	Sexual contact (oral, vaginal or anal)	Antibiotics	YES	Transmission to newborn, problem pregnancy, infertility, increased risk of cervical cancer, problems with prostate, disease affecting testicles
GONORRHEA also known as “Clap,” “Drip”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discharge from vagina, penis or rectum • Pain with urination • Sore throat 	Sexual contact (oral, vaginal or anal)	Antibiotics	YES	Transmission to newborn, infertility/pelvic inflammatory disease, arthritis/heart disease, blindness
SYPHILIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage I: Sores on mouth, vaginal area, breast, penis, and/or fingers • Stage II: Rash on body, flu-like symptoms 	Sexual contact (oral, vaginal or anal)	Antibiotics	YES, but damage done can not be reversed.	Transmission to fetus or newborn, heart disease, brain damage, blindness, death
HUMAN PAPILOMA VIRUS also called “HPV,” “warts”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fleshy growth on, or in, sex organs • Itching or burning on, around, or in sex organs 	Sexual contact (oral, vaginal, anal or skin to skin)	Application of chemical solution, freezing, surgical removal	NO, but can be treated during outbreaks. Virus stays in the body and outbreak can occur at anytime.	Transmission to newborn, increased risk of cervical cancer or cancer of penis
HERPES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flu-like symptoms • Itching or burning on, or in, sex organs • Painful blisters in, on, or around sex organs • Or, no symptoms 	Sexual contact (oral, vaginal, anal or skin to skin)	Antiviral medications	NO, but can be treated during outbreaks. Virus stays in the body and outbreak can occur at anytime.	Transmission to newborn
HEPATITIS B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flu-like symptoms that do not go away • Dark urine • Jaundice • Or, no symptoms 	Sexual contact (oral, vaginal or anal) Sharing of needles, contact with blood of infected person	Rest and good nutrition	NO, but can be prevented by vaccine	Transmission to newborn, liver damage, can be unknown carrier
HIV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flu-like symptoms that don't go away • Weight loss • Fever • Diarrhea • White spots in mouth 	Sexual contact (oral, vaginal or anal), sharing of needles, contact with blood of infected person	Medication and rest	NO	Transmission to fetus or newborn, AIDS