

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES— PREVENTION

About STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are diseases that are spread from one person to another when they are involved in some type of sexual activity. There are many different types of STDs. Some of the more common are herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhea, pubic lice, syphilis, condylomata (sexual warts) trichomonas, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), and hepatitis B (a liver disease).

Some of these diseases are more dangerous than others. Some have treatments available, but not all. Some can be deadly or make you very sick.

Many times a person can have one of these diseases and not know it because they don't have any symptoms; they don't feel sick. Then they can unknowingly spread the disease to their sexual partner if careful precautions aren't always used (read on). Sometimes a person suspects or knows that he/she may have an STD, but is too embarrassed to talk about it with their sexual partner. Again, if safer-sex isn't practiced every time, then their sexual partner is at risk for also getting the disease. Remember also that STDs can be passed to you from anyone your partner has had sex with!

Deciding to Have Sex

Having sex can be a very loving and special experience between two people. However, you must think about several important issues before you decide to have sex. Not only does sex have the potential for giving you a sexually transmitted disease, but you also can get hurt emotionally, because it involves such strong feelings between two people. Decide ahead of time what is right for you. Find an adult with whom you can discuss your feelings and opinions, and ask questions. Some teens know that they can discuss these things with their parents, even though it is sometimes awkward to start the conversation. Other adults with whom you might be able to get valuable information include officials at your church, school counselors or teachers, or adult relatives. Your doctor's office also can help you, and you can usually ask questions confidentially.

Safer Sex

When talking about sex and sexual diseases, the only absolutely risk-free activity is to not have sex (also known as **abstinence**). Many teens decide to delay having sex until they are older, married, or feel more comfortable. Many sexual activities are almost always safe without taking any special precautions. These include holding hands, hugging, touching, and kissing.

Other sexual activities, especially sexual intercourse, are very risky if precautions aren't taken and if you don't think things through and talk with your sexual partner. If you have vaginal or

anal intercourse, you can protect yourself against almost all of the STDs by using **condoms** each time (see “Using Condoms” below).

Using Condoms

1. Be prepared. Always have several condoms with you.
2. Pinch the condom at the tip to squeeze out the air.
3. Roll the condom all the way down the erect (hard) penis. (Don't try to put a condom on a soft penis).
4. After sex, hold onto the condom while the penis is being pulled out.
 - Never re-use the same condom. It is a good idea to have two available in case one breaks.
 - If a condom breaks, as soon as you realize it, take it off and put another one. If you don't have another, stop having sexual intercourse until you can get another condom.
 - The man should pull out of his sexual partner while the penis is still hard. If his penis gets soft first, the sperm can leak around the condom.
 - Condoms are sold in drug stores. Buy latex rubber or plastic condoms. Never use condoms made from animal skins; they can leak.
 - If you use a lubricant with condoms, make sure it is water-based (like K-Y jelly). Do not use Vaseline or Crisco; these can cause the condom to break.
 - Some condoms are lubricated with a chemical, Nonoxynol-9, which helps kill some of the germs that cause STDs. Others are dry condoms. It doesn't matter which one you use as long as you use a condom every time you have sex.

There is a **female condom**, one that lines a woman's vagina, but it is more difficult to use. Talk with a doctor or nurse or other adult who knows how to use it before you try it.

Other Information About STDs

- Your chance of getting an STD is greater if you have more than one sexual partner.
- Douching the vagina or showering after sex does not prevent STDs. In fact, it removes some of the normal protective bacteria in the vagina and may actually increase the risk of getting an STD.
- Withdrawal (when a man pulls his penis out before he ejaculates/“comes”) is not a way to prevent STDs or pregnancy. However, if a man is not wearing a condom, it reduces the risk somewhat to pull out before he ejaculates.
- You can get the same STD again, even if you have had it once and been treated.
- You can get an STD even if you have sex just one time.
- It is dangerous to mix alcohol or drugs with sexual activity, because they might lead you to take risks (you might forget or not care about using a condom).
- Other birth control methods, such as birth control pills or Depo shots, don't prevent you from getting an STD. You still want to protect yourself with condoms.
- If you have symptoms of an STD, getting treated sooner rather than later is important.

Call Our Office If:

- You have any symptoms that you think might be an STD. These include
 - Burning or pain when urinating (“peeing”)
 - Strange or weird-smelling discharge from the vagina or penis
 - Itching, burning, or pain around the vagina, penis, or anus (“bottom”)
 - Rashes, sores, blisters, or growths around the vagina, penis, or anus
- You think you may have been exposed to someone with an STD.
- You had sex without a condom and might need emergency contraception (the “morning after” pill) to prevent a pregnancy.
- You miss your period and you have had sex with someone (you might be pregnant).
- You have questions about sex.