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# STDs

## Sexually Transmitted Diseases



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**I**t's the problem you don't want to think about. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) affect both men and women. Antibiotics and vaccines can help control many diseases, but STDs are more troubling than ever. About 19 million cases occur in the United States each year, **nearly half of them in teens and young adults** between the ages of 15 and 24. And with the rise of HIV/AIDS, STDs have joined the ranks of killers. Luckily, STDs can be prevented and treated.

## General Considerations

### *What are STDs?*

STDs are infections that you get by having sex. Sex between a man and a woman is how most STDs are spread, but they can also be spread by oral sex, anal sex, or contaminated drug needles and blood products. Pregnant women can also transmit STDs to their newborns.

More than 30 different infections can be transmitted sexually. The most important ones are listed in Table 1 (see right).

This brochure will cover basic guidelines for the prevention and diagnosis of STDs. For information about specific STDs of greatest concern, visit [www.patientedu.org/STDs](http://www.patientedu.org/STDs).

Table 1 Major STDs in the U.S.

Caused by bacteria	Gonorrhea
	Syphilis
	Chlamydia
	Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
Caused by viruses	HIV/AIDS
	Genital herpes
	Human papilloma virus (HPV)
	Hepatitis A, B, and C
Caused by parasites	Trichomonas vaginitis*
	* bacterial and yeast vaginitis may also be transmitted sexually





## Who Gets STDs?

Anyone who is sexually active can get an STD, but some people are at much higher risk than others.

### *Risk factors include:*

- Having multiple or new sexual partners
- Having unprotected sex
- Living in a large city
- Having contact with sex workers
- Men who have sex with men
- Illicit drug use
- Having a previous STD

## Screening for STDs

It is important to diagnose STDs early for two reasons:

- 1 To start treatment as soon as possible
- 2 To prevent spreading the infection to others

### *The following people should be tested for STDs:*

- Anyone who has been exposed to an STD
- Men or women with symptoms of an STD, such as genital sores or ulcers
- Men with discharge from the penis or burning on urination
- Women with vaginal discharge, burning, or itching
- Women with lower abdominal pain and fever
- People who are at high risk, even without symptoms such as: people who have unprotected sex; young, sexually active women; men who have sex with men; and illicit drug users
- Pregnant women

### *Several types of screening tests are available. They include:*

- **Blood tests** for HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis
- **Urine tests** for chlamydia and gonorrhea
- **Bacterial cultures** for gonorrhea
- **Pap smears** for cervical cancer caused by HPV

Patients with positive results should receive appropriate counseling and treatment.

Personal physicians and public health officials should expedite testing and treatment of sexual contacts.





## Preventing STDs

The only sure way to prevent STDs is not have sex or only have sex with one partner who is healthy.

It sounds simple, but it doesn't stop millions of Americans from getting STDs every year. Even people who can't follow the simple rules of prevention can get substantial protection by practicing safer sex.

The most important aspect of safer sex is the proper use of a male condom. Latex condoms are best. If either partner is allergic to latex, a polyurethane condom should be used. Animal skin condoms do not prevent infection.

- Condoms should be **stored in a cool, dry place.**
- **Never** use condoms that are **torn, brittle, or discolored.**
- **Never reuse a condom.**
- If a condom breaks, **stop** sexual activity until the condom has been **replaced.**

A condom should be put on before any sexual contact occurs. It should be unrolled on the erect penis and fully cover it; a small space should be left at the tip to collect semen. Remove air pockets by pressing air down toward the base.

After ejaculation, the penis should be withdrawn while it is still erect. To prevent spills, hold the condom at its base during withdrawal. Finally, the condom should be wrapped in tissue and discarded.

**Water-based lubricants (such as "K-Y gel" and "Astroglide") are safe for condoms,** but oil-based lubricants (such as petroleum jelly, mineral oil, cold cream, and hand lotion) can damage latex. Spermicides do not provide additional protection against STDs.

**A female condom may also help prevent STDs,** but there is little data about how well it works. Other methods to prevent pregnancy do not protect against STDs.

**Vaccines can protect you from HPV and hepatitis A and B.** Preventive antibiotics should be used in people recently exposed to chlamydia, gonorrhea, or syphilis. People with genital herpes can take antiviral drugs to protect their partners.

For more information on specific STDs, visit [www.patientedu.org/STDs](http://www.patientedu.org/STDs). You'll learn about the diagnosis and treatment of the major STDs, and you'll also get the most important message of all: ▶

