

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Common Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Your doctor wants you to know about the following STIs. Some STIs can result in serious consequences, such as cancer, long-term pain, infertility (difficulty having children), and ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy in which the fetus grows outside the womb). The only way to be sure that you don't get an STI is to refrain from having sex (abstinence). However, if you do get an STI, the good news is that many of them can be treated with antibiotics and, if caught early, can be completely cured. Even when an STI isn't curable, getting treatment can result in a longer, healthier life. Treatment is also important for reducing the spread of these infections to others.

□ Herpes

- Up to 60 million people have genital herpes; as many as 90% may be unaware that they have it.
- About **1 in 4** Americans over age 12 have genital herpes.
- An estimated **1.6 million** new cases of genital herpes occur each year.
- Although the infection is largely asymptomatic, when symptoms do occur they can include painful, recurrent blisters around the genitals (genital herpes) or the mouth (oral herpes).
- Herpes cannot be cured, but medication can reduce the number of outbreaks, decrease pain, and speed recovery.
- Outbreaks of genital herpes during childbirth can cause death of the infant or severe, permanent disabilities such as brain damage in the newborn.

□ Trichomoniasis

- An estimated **7.5 million** Americans are infected with trichomoniasis annually.
- Women may experience a yellow-green, odorous discharge from the vagina, pain during urination or sex, and abdominal pain.
- Men may experience an unusual discharge from the penis, or pain during urination or ejaculation.
- Antibiotics are highly effective treatments and help to prevent transmission.
- In pregnant women, untreated trichomoniasis can sometimes cause premature labor.

□ Chlamydia

- An estimated **2.8 million** Americans are infected with chlamydia each year. Of those infected, 50% of men and 75% of women are asymptomatic.
- When symptoms do occur they can include an unusual discharge from the vagina or penis, a burning sensation during urination, or bleeding between menstrual periods.
- Chlamydia is easily cured, often with one dose of antibiotics.
- Without treatment, 20% to 40% of women will suffer pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can cause infertility, abnormal pregnancy, and long-term pelvic pain.
- In men, chlamydia can cause infertility, arthritis, and other serious problems.
- Infection during birth can cause severe eye and lung infections in babies.

□ Genital Warts

- At any given time, an estimated **1.4 million** people in the United States have genital warts.
- Methods to remove genital warts include freezing, chemical treatment, and surgery.
- If not treated early, genital warts can become difficult to remove and, in some cases, can lead to cervical cancer.

□ HIV/AIDS

- As many as **950,000** Americans may be infected with HIV, one-quarter of whom are unaware of their infection.
- Initial symptoms of HIV infection vary and can include fever, sore throat, and swollen lymph glands.
- HIV infection cannot be cured and may lead to acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), but treatment helps people live longer, healthier lives and makes it harder for HIV infection to be passed on to others.

□ Gonorrhea

- About **700,000** new cases of gonorrhea are reported each year.
- Gonorrhea may occur without symptoms in women, but can cause a burning sensation when urinating, pain during sex, unusual discharge from the vagina, or abdominal pain.
- Most men with gonorrhea experience an unusual discharge from the penis or a burning sensation when urinating.
- Gonorrhea is easily cured, usually with a single dose of antibiotics.
- Without treatment, women may develop PID and men can develop infertility and urinary problems. Untreated gonorrhea in pregnant women can also cause eye infections in newborns.

□ Hepatitis B

- Each year, about **81,000** new cases of HBV infection are reported. HBV is asymptomatic in 30% of people.
- Symptoms, which appear several weeks after infection, include fever, yellow skin, extreme tiredness, upset stomach, and abdominal pain.
- Treatments for HBV infection are often ineffective but vaccines that prevent infection are available.
- Long-term HBV infection can lead to severe liver damage, requiring liver transplantation, or to cancer. People with chronic hepatitis can transmit the infection to others.

□ Syphilis

- Approximately **32,000** cases of syphilis were reported in the United States in 2002.
- Symptoms of syphilis occur in three stages.
 - In the first stage (10 to 90 days after infection) small, round, painless sores may appear on the penis, vagina, anus, rectum, or mouth. These generally disappear without treatment in 3 to 6 weeks but the disease is still active.
 - In the second stage, a highly contagious rash (rough red or brown spots) may appear on the palms, soles, or other parts of the body. Other symptoms include fever, swollen lymph glands, hair loss, headaches, extreme tiredness, and muscle loss.
 - During the third stage, often occurring years later, syphilis damages organs and destroys blood vessels and nerve cells in the brain and spine, causing cardiovascular problems, paralysis, blindness, insanity, and death.
- Syphilis can usually be cured with a single dose of penicillin. Early treatment is critical because therapy cannot reverse damage that has already occurred.
- Syphilis infection during pregnancy can kill the baby before birth or cause serious, permanent disabilities such as blindness or damage to the heart, brain, or skeleton.

For more information, talk to your doctor, contact the HIV Hotline (1-800-342-AIDS) or STI Hotline (1-800-227-8922), or visit these Internet sites:

- American Social Health Association: www.ashastd.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/disease_info.htm
- Quest Diagnostics: www.questdiagnostics.com/women

The material contained in this handout is for informational purposes only. No information contained herein constitutes or can serve as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your doctor if you have any questions and before you stop, start, or change any treatment plan, including the use of medication. The diagnosis or treatment of any disease or condition may be based on personal or family medical history, symptoms, a physical examination, and other information considered important by your doctor, along with the additional information provided by test results.