

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): An Introduction

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs, also known as sexually transmitted diseases or STDs) are transmitted through body fluids: vaginal secretion, semen, blood, breast milk, and saliva. A common misconception is that the only way to get an STI is by having intercourse. This is not true! STIs can be transmitted without having intercourse. For example, skin-to-skin contact or genital rubbing can transmit HPV and the herpes virus. That's why it is important to get tested.

Do not let yourself feel ashamed, embarrassed, or guilty if you have a sexually transmitted infection. STIs are among the most common infections that occur in the United States today. When diagnosed early, the majority of STIs can be cured or treated to alleviate symptoms. If left untreated, STIs can lead to serious health conditions such as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), cervical cancer, infertility, and can even be fatal. Do not hesitate to make an appointment to see a medical provider for a checkup, testing, and treatment.

SOME STATISTICS

(Sources: American Social Health Association, Centers for Disease Control, and Planned Parenthood.)

According to the CDC, adolescents (10- to 19-year-olds) and young adults (20- to 24-year-olds) are at higher risk for acquiring STIs for a number of reasons. People in these age groups may be more likely to have multiple sexual partners rather than a single, long-term relationship. They may also be more likely to engage in unprotected intercourse, and they may be involved with partners at higher risk.

Statistics concerning college students indicate that:

- Two thirds of all STIs occur in people 25 years of age or younger.
- 1/4 of new STI infections occur in teenagers.
- By the age of 24, 1 in 3 sexually active people will have contracted an STI.
- The highest rates of genital HPV infections are found in adults between the ages of 18 to 28.
- In 2000, 15- to 19-year-old women had the highest rate of gonorrhea compared to all other age groups. In addition, 20- to 29-year-old women had the highest rates of primary and secondary syphilis.
- Among men, 20- to 24-year-old men had the highest rate of gonorrhea and 4th highest rates of primary and secondary syphilis.

TYPES OF STIs

There are 2 main types of STIs: bacterial and viral. Bacterial STDs, such as gonorrhea, syphilis, and chlamydia, are often cured with antibiotics. Viral STIs, such as HIV, HPV/genital warts, herpes, and hepatitis have no cure. Their symptoms can be alleviated with treatment and the risk of exposing a partner can be reduced.

Information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is presented to help you make informed decisions about your sexual activity, such as deciding to be tested for sexually transmitted infections, improving communication in relationships, and increasing the awareness of this hidden epidemic.

Fact Sheets on UHS Web Site

- STI Testing Information
- Bacterial Vaginosis
- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Hepatitis B
- Herpes
- HIV / AIDS
- HIV Testing at UHS
- Human Papillomavirus / Genital Warts
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
- Scabies, Lice, and Crabs
- Syphilis
- Talking with a Partner about STIs
- Oral Sex & STIs