HIV and AIDS: A special case

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the most serious STI because it attacks your body’s immune system. As of now, there is no cure for HIV. Having another STI such as syphilis or gonorrhea can increase your risk of getting or giving HIV.

How can I make sex safer?

- If you or your partner have other partners, get tested for STIs before you have sex with each other.
- Be prepared. Both men and women should carry condoms and know how to use them correctly.
- Use a new latex condom every time you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- Use only water-based lubricants. Do not use lotions, creams or Vaseline with latex condoms since the oil in these products damages the condom.
- Women age 25 and under who are sexually active should be tested for chlamydia at least once a year, even if there are no symptoms present.
- Ask your healthcare provider for the HPV and Hepatitis vaccine.

What is the right way to use a condom?

- Treat condoms gently so they don’t get damaged or torn. If it looks damaged, don’t use it!
- Put the condom on before sex (before the penis touches the vagina, mouth, or anus).
- If you put the condom on backwards or inside out, don’t flip it over—throw it out and get a new one.
- Hold the condom by the tip to squeeze out the air.
- Roll the condom on the erect (hard) penis.
- After sex, hold onto the rim of the condom and withdraw (pull out) the penis before losing erection.
- Once a condom is used, throw it out.

Since 1914, the American Sexual Health Association (ASHA) has been dedicated to improving the health of individuals, families, and communities, with an emphasis on sexual health and a focus on preventing sexually transmitted diseases and their harmful consequences.

ASHA offers a wide range of patient education materials, including books, brochures, fact sheets, and more. To see all our available materials, please visit our online store at www.ashapublications.org or call ASHA Customer Service at 800-783-9877.

HAVE QUESTIONS? GET ANSWERS.

Get direct answers to your STD questions and have an online dialogue with medical experts. Learn more about this service at www.askexpertsnow.com.

Make an appointment to talk with ASHA staff and get answers to your questions by phone or chat. Learn more about Person2Person at www.ashasexualhealth.org.
What are sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

STIs are infections that are spread through sex ("sex"). Sometimes referred to as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), they are very common. It’s important to be aware of STIs and how to prevent them.

STIs are common infections like chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and HIV. The CDC estimates that nearly 20 million new sexually transmitted infections occur every year in this country, half among young people aged 15–24. If you have sex with someone who has a STI, you can get a STI too. Most people do not know it when they have a STI.

How do I know if I have a STI?

Some STIs will cause very obvious symptoms. But many STIs cause no symptoms or only mild symptoms, so you may not know you have an infection. A test from your healthcare provider may be the only sure way to tell if you are infected.

If you do have symptoms, they may appear right away, or they might not show up for weeks or even months. They might come and go. Even if the symptoms disappear, you may still have a STI.

Important points for treating STIs successfully

- Avoid sex until you and your partner(s) have finished treatment.
- Take all of the medicine you are given, even if you start to feel better.
- Never take anyone else’s medicine or give your medicine to someone else.
- Tell anyone you have had sex with that they may have a STI and need to be tested. If you need help telling your partner(s), there are several services online that will notify your partner(s) anonymously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STI</th>
<th>How you get it</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Nongonococcal urethritis (NGU) and Trichomoniasis (Trich)</td>
<td>genital-to-genital contact</td>
<td>Unusual discharge, burning or pain during sex or while peeing, needing to pee often, itchiness</td>
<td>Cured by taking antibiotics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herpes (mouth and genital)</td>
<td>skin-to-skin contact</td>
<td>Ulcers that start as a sensitive red area that progresses to a “bump” then a blister, an ulcer (open sore), and finally to a dry crust that heals without a scar. Also possible are fever and pain with the first outbreak</td>
<td>Cannot be cured but can be treated to relieve symptoms and reduce the risk of spreading to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)</td>
<td>vaginal, anal or oral sex or sharing needles</td>
<td>Fever, rash, joint pains and swollen bumps on the body, neck and armpit (lymph nodes)</td>
<td>Cannot be cured but can be treated to relieve symptoms and reduce the risk of spreading to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human papillomavirus (HPV)</td>
<td>vaginal, anal or oral contact</td>
<td>Flesh colored genital warts that do NOT cause itching, burning or pain. Most HPV infections will not lead to visible warts</td>
<td>Cannot be cured but can be treated to reduce the risk of spreading to others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Syphilis</td>
<td>genital-to-genital contact</td>
<td>Painless sore called a “chancre” that can last up to 6 weeks and will go away without treatment, then moves to symptoms like headache, fever, and rough, reddish-brown rash on the hands, feet and other parts of the body</td>
<td>Early diagnosis is usually cured with one high dose of antibiotics, the later the diagnosis the more aggressive the antibiotic treatment</td>
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