

## **FACT SHEET**

# TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

## SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

## What are sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)?

- Sexually transmitted diseases are infections that can be spread through vaginal—penile, anal, or oral sex.
- Sexually transmitted diseases are passed between individuals through contact with the genitals, skin, mouth, rectum, or bodily fluids.
- There are more than 20 different STDs. They include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), human papillomavirus (HPV), herpes, gonorrhea, chlamydia, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, trichomonas, and syphilis.

## Are STDs a big problem?

- Yes, each year there are nearly 19 million new cases of STDs and approximately 9 million (48%) occur among teenagers and young adults.
- Approximately one in four teenagers and young adults get an STD each year.

### Who is at risk of STDs?

- · Those who are having sex or sexual contact
- Young people who have multiple partners (more than one partner in a lifetime) or if a partner has had multiple partners
- Those whose partner is infected with an STD
- Those who abuse alcohol or other drugs because they are more likely to have unprotected sex

## What are the health effects of STDs?

- Sexually transmitted diseases can make you sick or cause permanent harm to your body.
- They may cause problems ranging from mild irritation to severe pain, illness, cancer, and even death.
- Untreated infections can cause infertility or harm to a fetus when a women is pregnant.
- Sexually transmitted diseases may have no noticeable symptoms at first but may cause problems later, such as cervical cancer.

# How long do STD infections last? Can you be cured?

- Some STDs, such as chlamydia and gonorrhea, can be easily cured with antibiotics.
- Some STDs, such as herpes and HIV, have no cure. Herpes can be treated to relieve symptoms.
- Early diagnosis and treatment offer the best chance for curing the disease, preventing consequences such as infertility and preventing spread to others.
- If you have been diagnosed with an STD, it is important to tell your partner so they also can get tested and treated.

## What are the symptoms of STDs?

- Often there may be no symptoms or only very mild symptoms. You cannot always tell if a person has an STD, and they may not know about it themselves.
- Symptoms can include discharge from the vagina or penis, itching in the genital area, pain with urination or during sex, abdominal pain, growths on the penis or around the vagina, and sores or blisters on the genitals.

## How can STDs be prevented?

 The only sure way to prevent STDs is to abstain from sex or to practice lifetime mutual monogamy (in which both partners have only had sex with each other and no one else).

# If you are having sex, there are ways to decrease the risk of getting STDs

- · Immunizations
  - Make sure you've gotten immunized against HPV (see the "Human Papillomavirus" fact sheet) and hepatitis B.



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- Limit the number of sexual partners
  - Talk to your partner about previous sexual experiences, STDs and STD symptoms, and number of partners.
  - Avoid sex with people who might have an STD.
  - Avoid sex with those who have had multiple partners.
  - Avoid "one night stands."

#### Condoms

- Use a condom correctly and consistently (every time you have vaginal, anal, and oral sex).
- Avoid risky sexual practices, such as unprotected anal intercourse.
- Visit the doctor for STD counseling, screening, diagnosis, and treatment
  - Every year.
  - Every time you have a new partner.
  - With your new partner before starting a sexual relationship with him or her.
  - If you have STD symptoms or just need to talk.

## What are the common STDs?

- · Chlamydia and gonorrhea
  - These are caused by bacteria that may infect the cervix in women or the urethra in men and women.
  - Teens with these diseases often have no symptoms or may have vaginal, penile, or rectal discharge, itching, pelvic pain, joint pain, or sore throat.
  - These diseases can spread to the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries, causing severe illness, pain, and infertility.
  - Chlamydia and gonorrhea can be cured easily with antibiotics.
  - All young women under the age of 25 years who have had sex should be tested for chlamydia at least once per year.
  - Testing for gonorrhea is recommended for anyone who is sexually active.

## Genital herpes

- Genital herpes is caused by a virus.
- It may cause painful or itchy sores in the genital area that can last from a few days to weeks.
- The sores heal, but the virus may remain in your body, and the sores may come back again.
- Treatment can help the sores heal, but there is no treatment to kill the virus.
- Infected individuals can shed virus and transmit infection even if they do not have any sores.

### · Hepatitis B

- Hepatitis B is a virus spread by blood and body fluids and can destroy the liver.
- It can be prevented by vaccination. Many teens and young adults in the United States have received the vaccine as children or as adolescents. Make sure you have received it.

## • Human Immunodeficiency Virus

- Human immunodeficiency virus is the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). When HIV infection becomes advanced, it is referred to as AIDS.
- Human immunodeficiency virus enters the blood stream through bodily fluids and invades and kills cells of the immune system, which will lead to AIDS.
- Although new medicines may slow the progression of HIV and AIDS, there is no cure.
- Because it can take several years after infection with HIV to develop AIDS, many people who are infected do not know their status.
- It is important to ask your doctor about getting an HIV test if you are sexually active.

## Human Papillomavirus

- Human papillomavirus is a common viral infection in teens that can cause genital warts and cervical
- Most infections have no symptoms.
- Warts may show up long after infection and may come and go for many years.
- Warts can be removed in several ways.
- A Pap test is highly effective at detecting abnormal cells on the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer.
  In doing so, it helps to prevent cervical cancer.
  Your first pap test should be done at age 21 years.
- Two vaccines to prevent cervical cancer (one of them also prevents genital warts) caused by certain HPV strains is approved for use in girls and young women ages 9–26 years. The vaccine works best if you get it before you have sex for the first time.

## Syphilis

- Treponema pallidum is a type of bacteria that causes syphilis.
- Syphilis can infect many parts of the body.
- Syphilis may not cause symptoms, but sometimes a painless, smooth sore on the genital area can be an early sign of disease.
- If found early, by the use of a blood test, syphilis is treated easily.
- If not treated, all signs may disappear, but could return years later in advanced stages that can cause severe disease.

#### Trichomonas

- Trichomonas infection can cause an unpleasant smelling discharge and vaginal discomfort and can be seen with other STDs.
- It can be easily cured with antibiotics.

#### · Hepatitis C

- Hepatitis C is a dangerous infectious disease that affects the liver and often results in death.
- It is transmitted mainly from the blood of one person to the blood of another person (blood to blood transmission).
- Various risky behaviors may place teens at risk of getting hepatitis C infection, including sharing straws during cocaine use. Other ways to get hepatitis C infection include being tattooed with unsterilized needles, body piercing, and using intravenous drugs.
- Hepatitis C usually is not spread by having sex with an infected person, but it can happen. It is important to use a condom with your partner to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

## For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information on STDs that may be of interest to young people. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

## Advocates for Youth

Telephone: (202) 419-3420 Web: www.advocatesforyouth.org

American Academy of Pediatrics Telephone: (847) 434-4000

Web: www.aap.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444

Web: www.acog.org

## The American Social Health Association

Telephone: (919) 361-8400

STI Resource Hotline: (800) 227-8922

Web: www.ashastd.org

www.ashastd.org/herpes/herpes\_hotline.cfm

## AWARE Foundation

Telephone: (215) 955-9847 Web: www.awarefoundation.org

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Telephone: (800) 311-3435 Web: www.cdc.gov/std

Women's health: www.cdc.gov/women

#### Go Ask Alice

Telephone (212) 854-5453

Web: www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

#### Johns Hopkins HIV Guide

The POC-IT Center Telephone: (410) 735-6546 Web: www.hopkins-aids.edu

## National Women's Health Information Center

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Telephone: (800) 994-9662 Web: www.4woman.org

## Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Telephone: (800) 230-PLAN (7526) or (212) 819-9770

Web: www.plannedparenthood.org

#### Sex, Etc

Center for Applied Psychology, Rutgers University

Web: www.sexetc.org

# Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

Telephone: (212) 819-9770 Web: www.siecus.org

## The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

Telephone: (800) 561-2416 or (613) 730-4192 Web: http://sogc.medical.org/index\_e.asp www.sexualityandu.ca/home\_e.aspx