



# TEXAS UROLOGY

## SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STD)

Ask anyone who is sexually active today for a reason to practice safe sex and they will say "AIDS". However, there are at least 25 other sexually transmitted diseases which may be contracted at a much greater risk than AIDS. They are all highly contagious, and strike millions of Americans each year, primarily teenagers and young adults.

One might think that only the promiscuous and those who live in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods are apt to become infected, but the truth is anyone who engages in unprotected sex with an infected partner can get an STD. STD's are the most common infectious diseases in the United States after the common cold and flu. STD's can affect anyone. Some STD's can be cured, some cannot. None may be dismissed as harmless.

Here is a brief summary of some of the more dangerous STD's.

### CHLAMYDIA

A bacterial infection that frequently can go on for a long time without producing symptoms. As many as four million Americans may contract the disease each year, many of them without knowing it. Chlamydia is spread through contact with infected mucous membranes. When symptoms are present, they include vaginal discharge, painful urination and abdominal pain. Treatment is with antibiotics taken several times a day for at least a week. All sexual partners should be treated to prevent re-infection.

Chlamydia cannot be taken lightly, even though the symptoms may be very mild and may disappear without treatment. Chlamydia is the leading cause of pelvic inflammatory disease in the female and may result in infertility. It can also cause an ectopic pregnancy (where the pregnancy occurs outside the uterus), which can be fatal. Chlamydia may also result in infertility in the male.

### GENITAL HERPES

It is estimated that some 30 million Americans have the disease with some 800,000 new cases each year. Herpes infections are triggered by the herpes virus, from the troublesome family that can cause genital lesions, cold sores, chicken pox, shingles, and perhaps even cancer. Type I herpes causes cold sores around the mouth. Type II is transmitted through intercourse, but it can infect the mouth during oral sex. About the only positive thin that can be said about herpes is that it is not deadly, but it is chronic. Once the virus gets in, it finds a permanent home in the nervous system where it lies quietly for a period of time, only to break out periodically and cause painful sores. A breakout can be triggered by stress, (or in the case of cold sores, exposure to sunlight), or it can be triggered by nothing at all.

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A few days after infection, flu-like symptoms may appear, along with fever, swollen glands, pains in the legs and abdomen, and painful blisters and sores on the genitals or mouth. These sores contain the virus and it is when they are present that infection is most apt to be passed along. Although the sores may eventually heal, the disease is not gone and may be transmitted even when no symptoms are present.

When newborns acquire herpes, they frequently develop neurological complications such as permanent brain damage, seizures, and mental retardation. More than a third born with these serious complications will die.

Herpes is a viral infection, so it cannot be treated with antibiotics. Acyclovir (Zovirax), which comes in an ointment and oral form may ease symptoms and prevent outbreaks, but it is not a cure.

### CONDYLOMA (GENITAL WARTS)

These tiny growth, which appear around the genitals are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV), which is also the same family of warts that is responsible for skin and plantar warts on the feet. Genital warts, however, are not so benign – they are three times more common than herpes and highly contagious. Some strains have been associated with cervical cancer in the female.

Genital warts are believed to be quite common, although many of them escape detection if they are within the vagina or present in a non-visible form on the penis. Immediate treatment by removal of the warts with surgery or topical preparations is recommended, but the virus may return.

### GONORRHEA

Gonorrhea now has the distinction of being the most frequently reported STD. It is generally contacted through intimate sexual activity. Estimates of gonorrhea prevalence vary from 1 million to 2.5 million new cases each year.

A cloudy vaginal/penile discharge, abdominal pain, burning with urination, or gainal bleeding in the female are early signs of the disease. A standard treatment is with antibiotics; new drugs are effective against the resistant strains.

Gonorrhea can also cause pelvic inflammatory disease or it may spread through the blood stream and affect other organs including the brain and heart. In the male, it can cause scarring in the urinary channel or urethra. Newborns may also be infected if the mother has gonorrhea, with their eyes being especially vulnerable.

#### **Reducing the odds:**

1. Limit your number of sexual partners.
2. Avoid sex with people you don't know well or those who you know to have multiple partners.
3. Always use a condom and spermicide, regardless of the need for contraception.
4. Avoid sex with people who you know are under treatment for STD
5. Avoid sexual contact with anyone who has visible lesions on the genitalia.
6. If infected with an STD, refrain from sexual activity until treatment has been completed.