

April, 2014 • Facts

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Many infections are spread during sex. In this newsletter, we will talk about just a few of them:

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Trichomoniasis
- *Mycoplasma genitalium*
- *Ureaplasma urealyticum*

Chlamydia and gonorrhea

These occur in both men and women, but they are of greater concern in women. This is because they can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can cause pain in the belly and pelvis and pain during sex. It can also cause an abnormal pregnancy or make it so the woman can't get pregnant.

Women who do get pregnant can pass the infection to their babies during delivery. Their babies can then get a lung or eye infection.

Symptoms

Many women have no symptoms. Others have pain or burning when urinating. Some have an abnormal fluid coming from the vagina or spotting between periods. There can also be pain or tenderness in the belly.

Testing

Experts think women should be tested even when they don't have symptoms. It's important because:

- A person can be infected even when there are no signs of it
- There can be serious problems if it's not treated
- Treatment usually works well



How common are sexually transmitted infections?

There are about 20 million new infections every year.¹ Here are the data for the more common ones¹:

STI	Number of Cases
HPV	14.1 million
Chlamydia	2.9 million
Trichomoniasis	1.1 million
Gonorrhea	820,000
Genital herpes	776,000
Syphilis	55,400
HIV/AIDS	41,400
Hepatitis B	19,000

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These people should be screened²⁻⁴:

Chlamydia	Gonorrhea
Women with symptoms	Women with symptoms
Sex partners of infected people (with or without symptoms)	Sex partners of infected people (with or without symptoms)
All sexually active women ≤25 years of age (screen every year)	Women at high risk
Women >25 years of age who are at high risk	Pregnant women at high risk
All pregnant women	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• During the first prenatal visit• During the third trimester if ≤25 years and at increased risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• During the first prenatal visit• Again during the third trimester

Doctors should consider chlamydia screening for young men who go to adolescent clinics and STI clinics.²

Experts think patients should be tested again 3 months after treatment.² This is because reinfection is common.

Treatment

Doctors treat chlamydia with antibiotics. Treatment can last 1 day or 7 days, depending on the drug used. The drugs can easily cure the infection.

Doctors also treat gonorrhea with antibiotics. Not all of them will cure the infection, though. Some strains of gonorrhea have become resistant to certain antibiotics such as penicillin. These resistant strains are harder to treat.

Trichomoniasis

This is an infection that can cause a pregnant woman to deliver her baby early. Such babies are likely to weigh less than 5.5 pounds when born. The infection can also increase a person's risk of getting HIV.

Symptoms

Many people have no signs of the infection. Some men and women have pain when urinating. Some women have a strong-smelling, yellow, green, or gray fluid coming from the vagina. Women can have pain during sex. Some women have an itchy, irritated genital area.

Additional information

Learn more about STIs and how to prevent them at these websites:

- Office on Women's Health [womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/sexually-transmitted-infections.html](https://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/sexually-transmitted-infections.html)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [cdc.gov/STD/](https://www.cdc.gov/STD/)
- MedlinePlus [nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sexuallytransmitteddiseases.html)
- MedicineNet [medicinenet.com/sexually_transmitted_diseases_std_in_women/article.htm](https://www.medicinenet.com/sexually_transmitted_diseases_std_in_women/article.htm)

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Testing

Experts think people who have symptoms should get tested.² Women at high risk might also be tested.² Because there is a high rate of reinfection, testing women 3 months after treatment can be considered.² The benefit of this, though, has not been fully evaluated yet. Women with HIV should be tested every year.²

A wet mount is often done to diagnose the infection. But this method misses 30% to 50% of the cases.² Molecular methods such as TMA are more sensitive. They can detect about 99% of the cases.⁵

Treatment

Doctors usually give the patient a single pill to cure the infection. Sometimes a medicine can be applied to the skin. But this medicine doesn't work as well as the pill.

Mycoplasma and Ureaplasma

M genitalium and *U urealyticum* are common in sexually active people. Most people with these organisms don't have an infection. But under the right conditions, both organisms can cause infection. Urethritis is the most common type of the infections they cause. Others include cervicitis, bacterial vaginosis, and PID.

Testing

Doctors consider testing for these 2 organisms in symptomatic patients who²:

- Test negative for the more common causes of the infection (eg, gonorrhea and chlamydia)
- Did not respond to the initial therapy

These organisms are hard to grow in culture, but molecular methods such as PCR can be used for testing.

Treatment

Doctors treat these infections with antibiotics known to work on them.

References

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4. Nelson HD, Helfand M. Screening for chlamydial infection. *Am J Prev Med*. 2001;20(suppl 3):95-107.
5. Nye MB, Schwebke JR, Body BA. Comparison of APTIMA *Trichomonas vaginalis* transcription-mediated amplification to wet mount microscopy, culture, and polymerase chain reaction for diagnosis of trichomoniasis in men and women. *Am J Obstet Gynecol*. 2009;200:188.e1-188.e7.