

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

What is sexually transmitted disease (STD)?

An STD is an illness that is spread through sexual contact.

How can sexually transmitted disease be avoided?

- The less sexual partners a person has, the lower risk of infection;
- Most sexually transmitted diseases can be avoided to a large extent by practicing safe sex;
- Most sexually transmitted diseases can be cured if they are diagnosed and treated in their early stages;



The most common diseases and their symptoms are: Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Herpes genitalis, HIV and AIDS, Genital warts and Syphilis.

Chlamydia

Chlamydia is the most common and fastest spreading sexually transmitted disease, it stems from a bacterium, Chlamydia trachomatis. Women diagnosed with Chlamydia can also infect their newborn infant during delivery. Symptoms usually appear approximately 7 to 21 days after infection and differ for men, women and children.

Symptoms in men:

- inflammation of the urethra (the bladder duct within the penis);
- stinging feeling when passing water;
- clear discharge from penis and possible itchiness around the opening;
- pain or tenderness in the testicles;

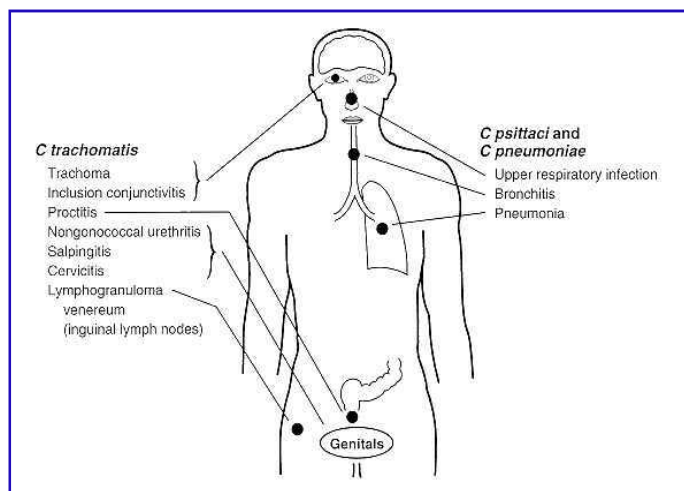
Symptoms in women:

- stinging feeling when passing water;
- unusual vaginal discharge;
- pain caused by pelvic inflammation;
- pain during intercourse;
- in some cases, bleeding between periods;

Symptoms in infants:

- inflammation of the eye at birth;
- problems breathing;
- premature birth; in rarer instances, pneumonia;

One of the most common ways of testing for Chlamydia is for the GP to collect a cell sample from the infected area (cervix or penis), with a cotton swab. This is then sent to a laboratory for evaluation. In the absence of a firm diagnosis, you may be referred to a specialist genitourinary clinic for further testing. Treatment consists of antibiotics, and should also be given to the patient's partner. A further swab is recommended once treatment has ended to check whether the infection has cleared.



Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is caused by Neisseria gonorrhoeae, a bacteria that grows and multiplies quickly in moist, warm areas of the body such as the cervix, urethra, mouth or rectum. In women, the cervix is the most common site of infection.



However, the disease can also spread to the uterus and fallopian tubes, causing pelvic inflammatory disease leading to infertility. Gonorrhoea is most commonly spread during genital contact, but can also be passed from the genitals of one partner to the throat of the other during oral sex. Gonorrhoea of the rectum can occur in people who practice anal intercourse. In pregnant women, gonorrhoea can be passed from an infected woman to her newborn infant during delivery if left untreated.

The early symptoms of gonorrhoea are often mild, and many women who are infected have no visible symptoms of the disease. If symptoms of gonorrhoea develop, they usually appear within 2 to 10 days after sexual contact with an infected partner, although a small percentage of patients may be infected for several months without showing symptoms.

Symptoms in women include:

- painful, burning sensation when urinating;
- yellowish or bloody discharge from the vagina;
- bleeding between periods;
- abdominal pain;

Men are more likely to show symptoms than women

Some of the symptoms in men include:

- burning sensation during urination;
- yellowish-white discharge from penis;

Other symptoms affecting the rectal area include itching, discharge and sometimes painful bowel movements. A diagnosis is made through detection of bacteria in samples taken from the urethra, cervix, throat or rectum.

The condition is treated with antibiotics, and treatment should also be given to the patient's partner. As the

Genital warts

Warts, or Condylomata acuminata, are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV). UP to 9 months can pass from the time of infection to the actual development of warts. In women, human papilloma virus can lead to changes in the cervix and to development of cervical cancer. Therefore, it is in condition is diagnosed and treated.



The symptoms are raised, wart like growths that may occur singly or in clusters.

In men, they are usually found around the head of the penis and tend to be drier.

In women, they appear most often around the vaginal opening and may spread to the rectal area. It is also possible for the virus to appear on or near the cervix as whitish, flat like lesions, usually only detectable through close visual examination of the cervix (colposcopy).

In both men and women, lesions may also be present in the mouth and throat. In general, symptoms can intensify if the immune system is weakened, or during pregnancy or if the person has diabetes.

The warts are very contagious so safe sex is advisable.

A diagnosis is made when a characteristic lesion is visible. By swabbing the skin with 5% acetic acid, invisible warts will emerge as white coloured patches. A GP can treat the warts by freezing and swabbing, but if this does not help the patient may be referred to a genitourinary specialist who can offer more specialised treatment. However, it is important to note that treatment does not always offer a complete cure.

Herpes genitalis

Genital herpes is a highly contagious viral condition caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). It principally infects the skin and mucous membranes of the genitals and rectum, but can also appear in areas such as the mouth. It is transmitted primarily through physical and sexual contact. During birth, the presence of herpes simplex virus on the genitalia or in the birth canal is a threat to the infant. Infection in the newborn infant can lead to herpetic meningitis, herpetic viremia and chronic skin infection.

The symptoms of herpes simplex virus usually occur a week after infection, but sometimes take longer to appear. Initially, the skin becomes reddened and multiple small blisters filled with a clear, straw-coloured fluid appear. Prior to the presence of blisters, the infected individual may also experience increased skin sensitivity, tingling, burning or pain at the site where blisters burst leaving shallow, painful ulcers which eventually scab and heal over a period of 7 to 14 days.

The outbreak may be accompanied by other symptoms such as:

- swelling and tenderness of the lymph nodes in the groin area;
- **in women**, vaginal discharge and painful urination;
- **In men**, a possibility of painful urination if the lesion is near the opening of the urethra;
- -Fever;



In most cases, a description of the condition and the appearance of the blisters will be enough to make a diagnosis.

The GP may also advise referral to a specialist genitourinary medicine clinic for confirmation of the diagnosis.

There is no cure for the herpes simplex virus; once infected, patients will remain carriers for the rest of their lives.

Some remedies, however, can reduce the duration of the eruption. In addition, by being more aware of the initial symptoms of recurrence, timely treatment with medication such as "aciclovir" will often abort the outbreak of blisters.

The best way to avoid transmission is to avoid contact with open lesions.

People with herpes simplex virus should avoid sexual contact when active lesions are present.

Although the symptoms of genital herpes may not be present, it is important for those infected to inform their partner that they have the disease. This will encourage both parties to use barrier protection (condoms), to prevent the spread of the illness. Using condoms and not sharing towels are good ways of reducing the chance of infection in the first place.

How to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

- **Avoid high-risk behaviours and practise safe sex.**
- **Though not necessarily practical or desirable, abstinence is the only way to completely prevent STDs;**
- **Avoid sex with many different partners;**
- **ALWAYS use condoms;**



SYPHILIS

What is Syphilis?

Syphilis is a very serious form of sexually transmitted disease. Fortunately, it can be cured these days.

It used to be a real scourge of humanity, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide.

However, since penicillin was invented, it has become far less common, particularly in developed countries.

How is Syphilis contracted?

In nearly all cases, Syphilis is caught through having some form of sex with an infected person.

This may be through:

- ordinary sexual intercourse;
- anal intercourse;
- oral sex;
- very rarely, through other forms of sexual contact;

In general, the disease will only be transmitted if a mucous membrane of an infected person comes into contact with a mucous membrane of somebody else.

Syphilis is not acquired from lavatory seats, as people sometimes claim.

Congenital Syphilis

Up until the 2nd World War, it was common for babies to be born with the terrible disease of congenital Syphilis, which they caught from their mothers. Features included blindness, deafness and brain damage.

What causes Syphilis?

Syphilis is caused by a germ called *Treponema Pallidum*. It is a minute corkscrew, shaped organism often known as "spirochaete".



Clinical features

Primary stage

Between 9 and 90 days after sexual contact, the person develops a small, reddish or brownish, button-like lump at the point of infection. Generally, it is about the size of a pea. It is most commonly located on the penis, the anus or the vulva, or in the mouth. It is completely painless, which may well lead the man or woman to believe that nothing serious is wrong.

A few days later, the lump breaks down into an ulcer or sore though in fact, there is no soreness. This lesion is called a "chancre".

The chancre heals in 3 to 10 weeks, sometimes leaving a slight scar. Unfortunately, the infected person may think that is the end of the matter, and not bother to seek treatment. However, there is a high probability that the Syphilis germs are still in the body and that the disease will now proceed to the secondary stage.

Secondary stage

Roughly 2 months after the original infection, the person is likely to develop secondary syphilis.

The features of this can include:

- rashes;
- feeling generally unwell;
- fever;
- headache;
- greyish-white patches inside the mouth and sometimes in the genital area;
- swollen glands;

However, secondary Syphilis can produce such an extraordinary variety of symptoms that very few doctors, apart from expert in this field, could diagnose it without the aid of blood tests.

The secondary Stage eventually settles down and once again the person may make the mistake of thinking that everything will be all right now. Unfortunately, it probably won't. Syphilis tends to proceed to the 3rd stage, which has truly terrible effects on the human body and mind.

Tertiary stage

Years after the original infection, occasionally as few as 3 years, but more often 10 or 20 years, the Syphilis germs are likely to start attacking various parts of the body, including the brain, the heart, the blood vessels, the spinal cord, the skin, the liver and the bones.

This 3rd stage of disease used to be a common cause of madness, paralysis and death.

Anyone who has primary or secondary Syphilis should always seek urgent treatment, because spontaneous recovery is unlikely.

Treatment

The usual treatment of Syphilis is with penicillin. If given in adequate dosage, this drug cures the infection.

It is vital to realise that if you are treated for Syphilis, you are likely to remain contagious for some time. **Please do not resume sexual contact with anyone until the doctor has told you that it is safe to do so**