Sexually Transmitted Infections or Diseases (STIs or STDs)

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Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

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Sexually transmitted infections (or diseases) (STIs or STDs): Infections passed from person to person through sexual contact

- HIV is an STI
  - More than 25 other STIs – mainly spread by vaginal, anal, and oral sex
The Basics

- World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 1 million people get an STI every day worldwide
  - Most people with STIs do not have any symptoms
    - Often unaware they can pass infection to their sexual partner(s)
  - If left untreated, STIs can cause serious health problems:
    - Cervical cancer
    - Liver disease
    - Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
    - Infertility
    - Pregnancy problems
• Having some STIs can increase risk of getting HIV if you are HIV-negative and get exposed to HIV:
  – Chancroid
  – Herpes
  – Syphilis
  – Trichomoniasis
• People living with HIV may also be at greater risk of getting or passing on other STIs
• People living with HIV often experience more serious problems if/when they get STIs
US has **highest rate of STIs in resource-rich world**

- About 20 million new infections occur each year
- Half occur among young people (15-24 years old) – more at risk for STIs than older adults, in part because:
  - Cervix (passage between vagina and womb) in adolescents and young women lined with cells more vulnerable to STIs
  - Teenagers, young adults may have problems getting information, services, supplies they need to avoid STIs
    - May have trouble getting STI prevention services
    - May not feel comfortable in places designed for adults
    - May have concerns about confidentiality

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Teenage girls and women of color have some of the highest rates of STIs – especially chlamydia, gonorrhea

- Result of several factors, including:
  - Higher rates of poverty
  - Less access to health care
  - Already high rate of STIs in communities of color

- Increases the risk of getting an infection each time a woman has sex
- More likely to have sex with an infected person within her community

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The Basics

• Regardless of race or age, *less than half of those who should be tested for STIs* receive screening
  – Especially important for women
  – More frequent/serious complications from STIs than men

• Many STIs have no symptoms; can still be transmitted
  – A lot of people who have an STI do not even know it
  – Only way to know for sure is regular STI screenings

• Many can be *prevented by practicing safer sex*

• Most can be *successfully cured or managed with treatment*
Many people with STDs *show no signs or symptoms*

- When there are signs of STIs, likely to be in genital area
- For women, this includes:
  - **Vulva** (area around vagina including lips)
  - **Vagina** (opening where menstrual blood comes out)
  - **Buttocks**
  - **Urethra** (opening above vagina where urine comes out)
  - **Anus** (opening where bowel movement comes out)
- For men, this includes:
  - **Penis**
  - **Scrotum** (“balls”)
  - **Urethra**
  - **Anus**
Chlamydia

- Among *most common STIs*
- Caused by bacterium vaginal secretions, semen ("cum")
- Can be spread by:
  - Vaginal, oral, or anal sex without a condom or other latex or polyurethane barrier
  - Pregnant women can pass it on to babies during delivery
- Symptoms may include:
  - Vaginal discharge
  - Burning during urination
  - Most women do not have any symptoms
Chlamydia

• Can be successfully treated with antibiotics
  – Left untreated, can spread to woman’s ovaries and fallopian tubes, cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
  – PID can lead to infertility, make it difficult or impossible to become pregnant

• Yearly screening recommended by US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for:
  – All sexually active women under 25
  – Older women with new or multiple sex partners
  – Recent reports show less than half of sexually active women under 26 are screened

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Genital Warts

• Caused by viruses
  – **HPV** (Human Papillomavirus) names large group of viruses
  – Certain types of HPV cause infections in genital area
    • Can lead to genital warts, cancer of cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, penis

• Genital HPV is spread easily:
  – Skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, oral, or anal sex
    • Condoms do not totally prevent transmission
  – People living with HIV *more likely to have HPV, develop genital warts, cervical or anal cancer*
Genital Warts

• Important to find HPV early via regular cervical screenings, get treatment, prevent health problems

• Also *three effective HPV vaccines*
  – Since HPV vaccine introduction several years ago, # of 14 to 19 year old girls with HPV in US has dropped by more than half

• Important for young people to get vaccinated before they have sex (before they have been exposed to HPV)
  – People who are already infected with HPV may not be protected by vaccines

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Gonorrhea ("The Clap")

- Caused by bacteria in vaginal secretions, semen
- Can be spread by:
  - Vaginal, anal, oral sex without latex/polyurethane barrier
- Symptoms may include:
  - Yellowish or greenish vaginal discharge
  - Burning feeling when urinating
  - Can also affect anus and throat
  - Many women have no symptoms
- Can be treated with antibiotics
  - Left untreated, can cause PID, infertility
  - All sexually active women should be screened

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Herpes

• Caused by a virus in nerves; two common types
  – Herpes simplex type 1 (HSV-1) usually causes cold sores around mouth
  – Herpes simplex type 2 (HSV-2) usually causes sores in genital area
  – Possible to get HSV-2 in mouth, HSV-1 in genital area

• Symptoms include itchy or painful blisters

• Spread through skin-to-skin contact with sores
  – May also spread even before sores can be seen
  – In most people, sores come and go; virus stays in body for life

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Herpes

- Sometimes no symptoms; virus "hiding" in nerves
  - Some women with HIV never had blisters or sores before HIV; surprised by "outbreak" of sores
  - Women with HIV may have more frequent, difficult to treat herpes outbreaks

- No cure for herpes; herpes antiviral drugs can:
  - Reduce # of outbreaks if taken daily
  - Shorten and ease outbreaks if taken when symptoms begin
  - Valtrex also shown to lower transmission risk

- Pregnant women can transmit herpes to babies
  - Tell your provider if you have genital herpes, are pregnant or planning pregnancy

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HIV

- HIV stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**
  - Virus that causes AIDS
- Present in blood, vaginal secretions, semen, breast milk
- Can be spread through vaginal, oral, or anal sex without condom or latex/polyurethane barrier
  - As many as 1 in 5 US people living with HIV do not know it
- Getting tested for HIV is part of routine, regular health care in many countries

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HIV

• Important that you get tested if you:
  – Have ever had vaginal, anal, or oral sex without a condom
  – Have shared needles, syringes to inject drugs, other substances
  – Are uncertain of partner’s HIV status; have a partner with HIV
  – Are pregnant or are considering becoming pregnant
  – Have ever been diagnosed with an STD
  – Have hepatitis C
  – Begin treatment for tuberculosis (TB)

• Left untreated, HIV can cause serious illness, death

• **Effective treatment helps** people living with HIV stay well

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Syphilis

- Caused by bacterium
- Can be spread by:
  - Vaginal, anal, or oral sex without latex or polyurethane barrier
- Has several phases:
  - **Primary syphilis** (early disease): Pain-free open sores (chancres) in genital or anal area or around mouth
    - Usually heal on their own in 3-6 weeks
  - **Secondary syphilis** (later stage): Often rash and/or hair loss
  - Left untreated, can proceed to **latent stage**
    - May have no visible symptoms; can damage heart, brain, other organs

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• Can be successfully treated with antibiotics
• Without treatment
  – Can hurt your body’s organs
  – Lead to severe illness, even death
• Pregnant women can pass syphilis to their babies during pregnancy and childbirth
  – Important that pregnant women get tested for syphilis
Other STIs to Know About

- Chancroid
- Hepatitis
- Pubic Lice ("Crabs")
- Trichomoniasis
Chancroid

- Caused by bacterium
- Symptoms may include:
  - Genital sores
  - Vaginal discharge
  - Burning feeling when urinating
  - Swollen lymph nodes in groin
- Can be spread by:
  - Vaginal or anal sex
  - Skin-to-skin contact with sores
- Can be treated with antibiotics

Credit: Medicinenet.com
Hepatitis

- Inflammation (irritation) of liver
- Some types of hepatitis caused by viruses in blood, vaginal secretions, semen, breast milk
  - Hepatitis A (HAV), hepatitis B (HBV), hepatitis C (HCV) can all be sexually transmitted
- Vaccine to prevent HAV and HBV, not HCV
  - HAV goes away on its own; HBV/HCV can become chronic (long-term), very serious
  - HBV and HCV often have no symptoms
  - Important for people living with HIV to be tested for HBV and HCV, treated if necessary
Pubic Lice ("Crabs")

- Live in pubic hair (hair around genitals)
- Can be transmitted by:
  - Skin-to-skin contact
  - Infected clothes and bedding
- Symptoms may include:
  - Intense itching
  - Seeing lice or eggs in hair
- Can be treated with over-the-counter medications
  - Pregnant women must use products designed just for them
  - Wash contaminated clothes, linen in hot water, laundry soap; kills lice, eggs

Credit: Jennifer2016 on Glogster
Trichomoniasis

• Caused by **protozoa** (single-celled germ)
• Can be spread during vaginal, oral, or anal sex without a condom or latex/polyurethane barrier
  – Common cause of vaginal infections
• Symptoms may include:
  – Foamy, foul-smelling vaginal discharge
  – Itching
  – Sometimes there are no symptoms at all
• Can be successfully treated with antibiotics
  – Person with trichomoniasis and her sexual partner must both be treated, or untreated partner can re-infect
Protecting Yourself and Others

You can *greatly reduce risk* of getting many STIs if you:

- Use a latex condom for vaginal and anal sex or a plastic condom if you are sensitive to latex
  - Female condom can also prevent many STIs
- Use condoms without lubricant for oral sex on a man
- Use latex or plastic barriers (dental dams, plastic wrap) for oral sex on a woman or for oral-anal sex; use latex or plastic gloves if you have cuts or sores on your hands
- Use water-based lubricants (KY, Astroglide) with latex barriers
- DO NOT use oil-based products (Vaseline, lotions); destroy latex
- Do not use lubricants or condoms that contain nonoxynol-9 (N-9)
  - Can damage lining of vagina or anus, increase HIV risk
Protecting Yourself and Others

- Wash shared sex toys or put on fresh condom between users
- Use a latex condom with methods of birth control (birth control pills, shots, implants, etc) that do not protect you from STIs
- Talk with your sex partner(s) about STIs and using condoms
- Talk honestly with your provider, sex partner(s), about any STIs you or your partner has or has had
- Have regular pelvic exams, cervical cancer screening (do not screen for STIs other than HPV)
- Talk to your provider about having routine STI screening
- Do not share needles or syringes for injecting drugs or other substances; if you do share drug equipment, clean your works
• There are many sexually transmitted infections, including HIV

• Some can be cured; many can be managed
  – Many can cause serious health and fertility problems or even death if untreated
    • If needed, get treatment your provider recommends
    • Even if symptoms go away, still need to finish treatment
  – Make sure your partner(s) gets treated, so that you do not pass an infection back and forth
Learn More!

• To learn more about this topic, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet on this topic:
  – Fact sheet: Sexually Transmitted Infections or Diseases (STIs or STDs)

• For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
  – www.thewellproject.org
  – www.facebook.com/thewellproject
  – www.twitter.com/thewellproject