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.

#onewomanatatime

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Sexually transmitted infections: 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

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The Basics

- World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 1 million people get an STI every day worldwide.
- STIs are similar to, but not the same as, STDs.
  - 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

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The Basics

- 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
- Over 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 young people 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 a person with an STI within her community

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• 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

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The Basics

• Many people with STIs show no signs or symptoms
  – When there are signs of STIs, likely to be in genital area
  – For cisgender 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 – “poop” – comes out)
  – For cisgender men, this includes:
    • Penis
    • Scrotum (“balls”)
    • Urethra
    • Anus

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Chlamydia

• Among **most common STIs**
• Caused by bacterium in vaginal secretions, semen ("cum")
• Can be spread by:
  – Vaginal, oral, or anal sex without a condom or other latex or polyurethane barrier
  – Pregnant people can pass it on to babies during delivery
• If there are symptoms, they may include:
  – Vaginal discharge
  – Burning during urination

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Chlamydia

• Can be successfully treated with antibiotics
  – Left untreated, can spread to 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 25 are screened

• If treated, partner must be treated, too

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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

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• Important to find HPV early and get treatment to 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
Gonorrhea ("The Clap")

- Caused by bacteria in vaginal secretions, semen
- Can be spread by:
  - Vaginal, anal, oral sex without latex/polyurethane barrier
- If there are symptoms, they may include:
  - Yellowish or greenish vaginal discharge
  - Burning feeling when urinating
  - Can also affect anus and throat
- Can be treated with antibiotics
  - Left untreated, can cause PID, infertility
  - All sexually active women should be screened
- If treated, partner must be treated, too

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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 people can transmit herpes to babies
  – Tell your provider if you have genital herpes and 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 7 US people living with HIV do not know it

• Getting tested for HIV is part of routine, regular health care in many countries
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 living 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

• Cannot transmit if treated, undetectable viral load (U=U)
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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Syphilis

- Can be successfully treated with antibiotics
- Without treatment
  - Can hurt your body’s organs
  - Lead to severe illness, even death
- Pregnant people can pass syphilis to their babies during pregnancy and childbirth
  - Important that pregnant people get tested for syphilis
- If treated, partner must be treated, too
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
Hepatitis

• Inflammation (irritation) of liver
• Some types of hepatitis caused by viruses in blood, vaginal secretions, semen, breast milk
  – Hepatitis B (HBV) and C (HCV) can be sexually transmitted
• Vaccine to prevent HBV, not HCV
  – Can become chronic (long-term), very serious
  – Often have no symptoms
  – Important for people living with HIV to be tested for HBV and HCV, treated if necessary
• HCV can be cured
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

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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
  - Sexual partner must also be treated
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, coconut oil, lotions)
- Do not use lubricants or condoms that contain nonoxynol-9 (N-9)
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 screenings (they do not screen for STIs other than HPV)
- Talk to your provider about having a routine STI screening
- Do not share needles or syringes for injecting drugs or other substances; if you do share drug equipment, clean your works
The Bottom Line

• There are many STIs, 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

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• 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](http://www.thewellproject.org)
  – [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](http://www.facebook.com/thewellproject)
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