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# Sexually Transmitted Infections or Diseases (STIs or STDs)

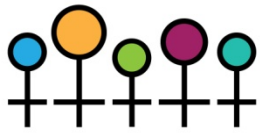
*Last updated: January 16, 2024*

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

#onewomanatatime

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

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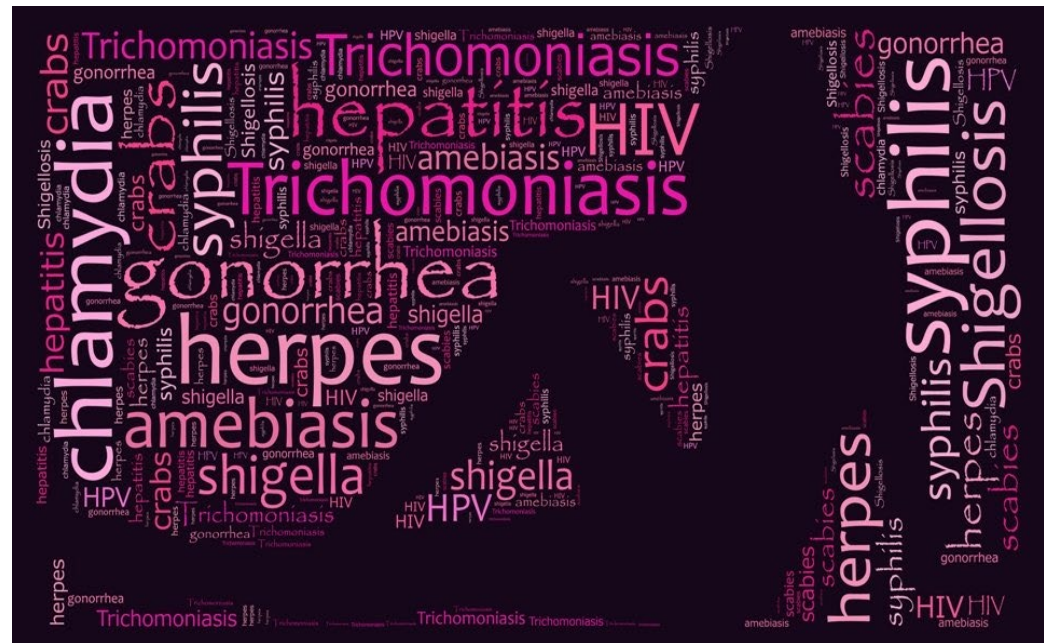


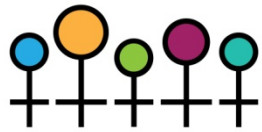
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# The Basics

*Sexually transmitted infections:* Infections passed from person to person ***through sexual contact***

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

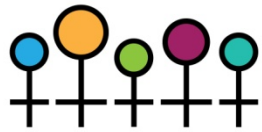




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# The Basics

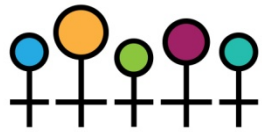
- World Health Organization (WHO): more than 1 million STIs acquired every day worldwide
- STIs are similar to, but not the same as, STDs
  - Most people with STIs do not have any symptoms
    - Often don't know they can pass infection on
  - Left untreated, STIs can cause serious problems:
    - Cervical cancer
    - Liver disease
    - Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
    - Infertility
    - Pregnancy problems



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# The Basics

- Having some STIs can increase risk of acquiring 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

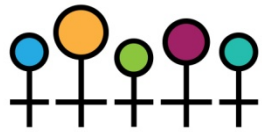


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# The Basics

## US has *highest rate of STIs in resource-rich world*

- About 26 million new infections in 2018
- Almost half among young people (15-24 years old)
  - more at risk for STIs than older adults because:
    - Young people's cervical 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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# The Basics

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

- Several factors:

- Higher rates of poverty
- Less access to health care
- Already high rate of STIs in communities of color



- Increases risk of getting an STI each time a woman has sex
- Sexual partner in community is more likely to have an STI



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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
- STIs without symptoms can still be transmitted
  - Many people who have an STI do not know it
  - Only way to know for sure is regular STI screenings
- STIs can be ***prevented by practicing safer sex***
- STIs can be ***cured or managed with treatment***

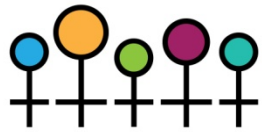


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# The Basics

- Many people with STIs *have no 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** (tube through which urine passes through penis)
    - **Anus**





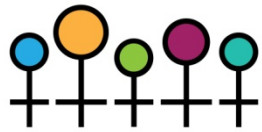
# Chlamydia

- Among ***most common STIs***
- Caused by bacterium in genital tract
  - Including vaginal secretions, semen
  - Also infections in throat and rectum (“butt”)
- Can be spread by:
  - Vaginal, oral, or anal sex without a barrier
  - Pregnant people can pass it on to babies during delivery
- Symptoms may include:
  - Vaginal discharge
  - Burning during urination



# Chlamydia

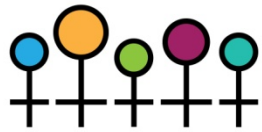
- Can be successfully treated with antibiotics
  - Left untreated, can spread to ovaries and fallopian tubes, cause **pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)**
  - PID can lead to infertility, make it difficult to become pregnant
  - Can cause infection in butt (rectal pain, discharge, bleeding)
- Yearly screening recommended by CDC for:
  - All sexually active women under 25
  - Older women with new or multiple sex partners
  - Recent reports show fewer than half of sexually active women under 25 are screened
  - Ask for test, if not offered by provider
- If treated, partner must be treated, too



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# Genital Warts

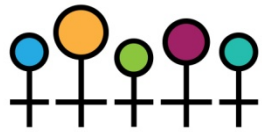
- Caused by viruses
  - **HPV** (Human Papillomavirus) is large group of viruses
  - Certain types of HPV cause infections in genital area
    - Genital warts, cancer of cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, penis
- Genital HPV is spread easily:
  - Skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, oral, or anal sex
    - Condoms do not entirely prevent transmission
  - People living with HIV ***more likely to have HPV, develop genital warts, cervical or anal cancer***



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# Genital Warts

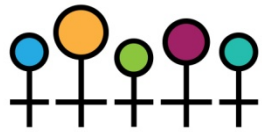
- Important to find HPV early and get treatment to prevent health problems
- Also ***three effective HPV vaccines***
  - # of girls with HPV has dropped significantly
- Best to get vaccinated before ever having sex (before being exposed to HPV)
  - Vaccines may not help people already infected
  - But vaccines may protect against different HPV strains
- Recommendation: people living with HIV be vaccinated up to age 45.



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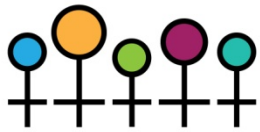
# Gonorrhea (“The Clap”)

- Caused by bacterium in vaginal secretions, semen
- Can be spread by:
  - Vaginal, anal, oral sex without condom or latex/polyurethane barrier
- Symptoms may include:
  - Yellowish or greenish vaginal discharge
  - Burning feeling when urinating
  - Pain, discharge, bleeding in butt
  - Itchy or persistent sore throat
- Can be treated with antibiotics
  - Left untreated, can cause PID, infertility
  - Request test if not offered by provider
- If treated, partner must be treated, too



# Herpes

- Caused by a virus in nerves; two common types
  - *Herpes simplex type 1* causes cold sores around mouth
  - *Herpes simplex type 2* 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 living with HIV never had blisters or sores before acquiring HIV; surprised by "outbreak" of sores
  - Women living with HIV may have more frequent difficult to treat outbreaks
- No cure; 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

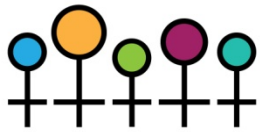


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# HIV

- HIV stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**
  - Virus that causes AIDS
- Is in blood, vaginal secretions, semen, breast milk
- Can be spread through vaginal, oral, or anal sex without condom or treatment-as-prevention method
- Getting tested for HIV is part of routine, regular health care in many countries
- Different testing recommendations for different areas of the world





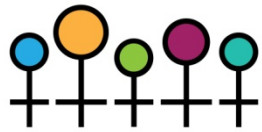
- Important that you get tested if you:
  - Have ever had vaginal, anal, or oral sex without a condom
  - Have shared needles, syringes to inject drugs, other substances
  - Are uncertain of partner's HIV status; have a partner living with HIV
  - Are pregnant or are considering becoming pregnant
  - Have ever been diagnosed with an STI or STD
  - Have hepatitis C
  - Begin treatment for tuberculosis (TB)
- HIV drugs
  - Help people living with HIV stay well
  - Can prevent people from acquiring HIV (PrEP)
- Cannot transmit if undetectable viral load (U=U)



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# Syphilis

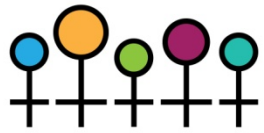
- Caused by bacterium
- Can be spread by:
  - Vaginal, anal, or oral sex without condom or other barrier
- Has several phases:
  - **Primary syphilis** (early disease): pain-free open sores (**chancres**) in genital or anal area or around mouth
    - Usually heal on their own in 3-6 weeks
  - **Secondary syphilis** (later stage): rash and/or hair loss



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# Syphilis

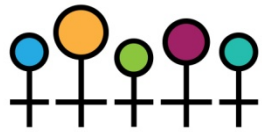
- Can be successfully treated with antibiotics
- Left untreated, can proceed to latent stage
  - No symptoms, but damage to heart, brain, eyes, etc.
- Longer-term: neurosyphilis
  - In brain or spinal cord -> can cause dementia, strokes
- Pregnant people can pass syphilis to their babies during pregnancy and childbirth
  - Important that pregnant people get tested for syphilis
- If treated, partner must be treated, too



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# Other STIs to Know About

- Chancroid
- Hepatitis
- Pubic Lice (“Crabs”)
- Trichomoniasis



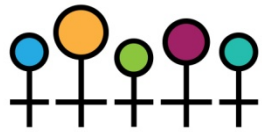
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# Chancroid

- 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



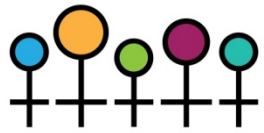
*Credit: Medicinenet.com*



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# Hepatitis

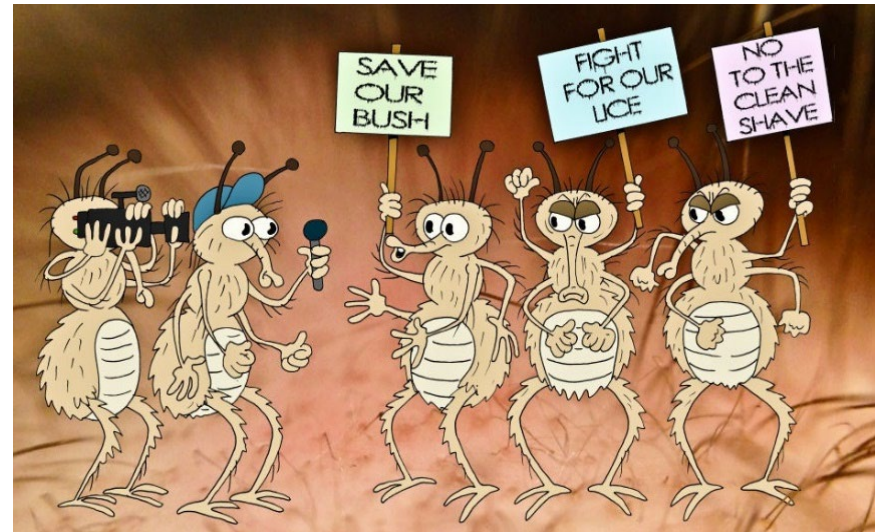
- Inflammation (irritation) of liver
- Some types of hepatitis caused by viruses in blood, vaginal secretions, semen, breast milk
  - Hepatitis B (HBV), C (HCV) can be sexually transmitted
  - Can become chronic (long-term), very serious
  - May have no symptoms
- Vaccine to prevent HBV
- Cure for HCV
- People living with HIV should be tested and treated for HBV, HCV



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# 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 people must use products designed just for them
  - Wash contaminated clothes, linen in hot water, laundry soap



*Credit: Jennifer2016 on Glogster*

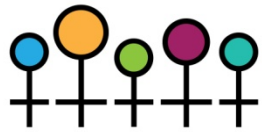


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# Trichomoniasis

- 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



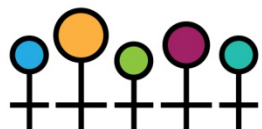


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# Protecting Yourself and Others

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

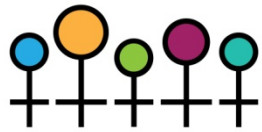
- Use a latex or plastic condom for vaginal and anal sex
  - Female condom can also prevent many STIs
  - Use condoms without lubricant for oral sex on a man
- Use latex or plastic barriers (dental dams, plastic wrap) for oral sex on a woman or for oral-anal sex; use latex or plastic gloves if you have cuts or sores on your hands
- Use water-based lubricants with latex barriers
- DO NOT use oil-based products
- Do not use lubricants or condoms that contain nonoxynol-9 (N-9)



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# Protecting Yourself and Others

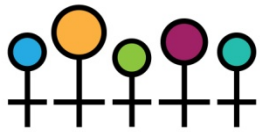
- Wash shared sex toys or use fresh condom between users
- Use a latex condom with methods of birth control that do not protect you from STIs
- Talk with your sex partner(s) about STIs and condoms
- Talk honestly with your provider, sex partner(s), about any STIs you or your partner has or has had
- Have regular pelvic exams, cervical cancer screenings
- 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



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# 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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# 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](http://www.thewellproject.org)
  - [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](https://www.facebook.com/thewellproject)
  - [www.twitter.com/thewellproject](https://www.twitter.com/thewellproject)
  - [www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv](https://www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv)