Sexually Transmitted Diseases

What Are Sexually Transmitted Diseases?

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infections that are spread from person to person through sexual contact. STDs are also called sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In this lesson, you will learn more about STDs, their causes, and how to prevent them. Figure 13.5 tells you some important facts about STDs.

Common STDs

STDs include a wide range of diseases. All these are passed on to partners who engage in sexual activity. All affect both men and women. The good news about STDs is that they are completely preventable. The bad news is the highest rate of increase in STDs is in the adolescent population. Some common STDs are described on the next page.
**FIGURE 13.5**

**The STD Fact File**

When you know the facts about STDs, you have the power to avoid them.

**What is the best way to avoid getting STDs?**

Someone who has an STD may not have visible symptoms, or may have symptoms that come and go. However, such a person may be contagious even when there are no symptoms.

STDs can make a person sterile or infertile.

A person who suspects that he or she is infected with an STD must see a doctor.

STDs can be prevented by saying no to high-risk behaviors, such as sexual activity.

Not all STDs are curable, and some are even fatal.

Vaccines are not available for most STDs.

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**Chlamydia** (kluh-MI-dee-uh) is a bacterial STD that may affect the reproductive organs, urethra, and anus. Chlamydia is often referred to as a “silent” disease because in many cases there are no symptoms; a person can have it and not know that he or she does. When symptoms do occur, they can include genital discharge and pain when urinating. Left untreated, chlamydia can cause other infections in the body and infertility. Chlamydia can be treated with antibiotics.

**Genital warts** are growths or bumps in the genital area caused by certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV infections are the most common type of STD in the United States. Like chlamydia, HPV is often a silent disease, causing no obvious symptoms until many years after the initial infection. People who are infected may not know they are infected and may not know that they are infecting others. The warts can be treated, but there is no cure for the HPV infection itself. Some strains of HPV are linked to the development of cervical cancer.

**Genital herpes** (HER-peez) is a viral STD that produces painful blisters on the genital area. Herpes often does not cause any obvious symptoms for many years. Some people have periodic outbreaks of painful blisters or sores. Even when the symptoms go away, the virus and the disease remain in the body. Other symptoms include pain anywhere in the lower half of the body and genital discharge. There is no known cure for genital herpes.
**Trichomoniasis** (TREE-koh-moh-NI-ah-sis) is an STD caused by the protozoan Trichomonas vaginalis. The disease may be silent, but symptoms can include vaginal discharge, discomfort during urination, and irritation or itching in the genital area. Trichomoniasis can be treated and cured with medications.

Pubic lice are insects that infect a person's genital area. People sometimes call pubic lice "crabs." Symptoms include itching around the genitals and crawling insects that are visible to the naked eye. Pubic lice are highly contagious. They can be treated effectively with medicated shampoo and prescription lotion.

**Gonorrhea** (gahn-uh-REE-uh) is a bacterial STD that affects the mucous membranes of the body, particularly in the genital area. Gonorrhea symptoms often include a thick yellowish discharge from the genitals and a burning sensation when urinating. Gonorrhea can be treated with antibiotics. Left untreated, gonorrhea can infect other parts of the body, including the heart. It can also cause fertility problems for both males and females.

**Syphilis** (SIH-fuh-luhs) is a bacterial STD that can affect many parts of the body. The symptoms of syphilis change as the disease progresses. Symptoms of the first stage include painless sores at the place of infection and swollen lymph glands. In the second stage, the bacteria can cause a severe rash. During late stages of syphilis, the bacteria move throughout the body. They can cause damage to many body organs, including the brain. Untreated disease can eventually cause mental disorders, heart problems, blindness, and death. If diagnosed and treated in the first or second stage, syphilis can be cured with antibiotics.

 Millions of cases of STDs occur each year in the United States. **What can be done to stop the spread of these diseases?**
**Hepatitis B** is a disease caused by the hepatitis B virus that affects the liver. It can be transmitted by sexual contact or through contaminated needles. There is a vaccine available for hepatitis B.

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection is an STD covered in Lesson 6. There is no cure for HIV infection.

Anyone who has had sexual contact with another person may have an STD and not know it. The only sure way to avoid getting an STD is to practice abstinence from sexual activity.

**Abstinence from Sexual Activity**

You cannot tell by looking at people if they have an STD. All STDs are dangerous. Some are deadly. Yet there is a 100 percent effective way to avoid STDs completely: abstain from sexual activity. Often, the media send the message that sexual activity is exciting. There is no mention of the risks. Engaging in sexual activity puts teens at risk for STDs and unplanned pregnancy. It can lead to social and emotional problems. If teens feel pressured to take part in sexual activity, they can use refusal skills to avoid it.

It's normal to have sexual feelings when you are a teen. Talking about these feelings with a parent or guardian can help you deal with them. It also helps you understand your family's values and what your parents expect of you.
Being a responsible teen involves upholding the values of your family. **How does abstinence from sexual activity show that you are responsible?**

This doesn’t mean you have to hide feelings of affection for others. You can share these feelings in ways that don’t risk your health or compromise values. Appropriate ways for teens to show affection include holding hands and complimenting someone. Practicing abstinence pays off in many ways. You can be sure that your relationships are built on shared interests and trust, rather than on sexual attraction.

By practicing abstinence from sexual activity, you protect yourself against unplanned pregnancy and STDs. You get to know someone in a way that goes beyond physical attraction. You show respect for the wishes of your family. You can remain committed to your long-term goals, such as education, career, and family.

**Lesson 5 Review**

**After You Read**

Review this lesson for new terms, major headings, and Reading Checks.

**What I Learned**

1. **Vocabulary** Define **sexually transmitted disease.**

2. **Explain** Why are some STDs referred to as “silent” diseases?

3. **List** What are two consequences of untreated chlamydia?

4. **Apply** What is the best way to avoid STDs?

5. **Explain** What are some appropriate ways for teens to show affection?

**Thinking Critically**

6. **Analyze** How do values influence a person’s decision to practice sexual abstinence before marriage?

**Applying Health Skills**

7. **Advocacy** Create a pamphlet that warns teens of the dangers of STDs. In your pamphlet, explain that many STDs cause harm without showing symptoms for a long time. Also discuss how sexual abstinence keeps teens safe and healthy.