



FACT SHEET — *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*

Key Points about Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Women Age 25 - 45 in the United States

- ◆ Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) affect men and women of all backgrounds and economic levels.
- ◆ The incidence of STDs is rising because people are becoming sexually active earlier while marrying later. In addition, divorce is more common.
- ◆ Many STDs initially cause no symptoms, especially in women. When symptoms do develop in women, they are often confused with those of other diseases not transmitted through sexual contact.
- ◆ Health problems caused by STDs tend to be more severe and more frequent for women than for men. This is because warning symptoms may not be obvious and as a result many women do not seek care until serious problems have developed.
- ◆ When diagnosed and treated early, almost all STDs can be treated effectively.
- ◆ Chlamydia is the most common STD for women; it is estimated that 5 percent to 25 percent of women will get this STD.
- ◆ 75 percent of women with chlamydia have no symptoms.
- ◆ There are over 750,000 reported cases of gonorrhea in women each year.
- ◆ There are 68,000 reported cases of syphilis in women each year.
- ◆ 33 percent of new STD cases each year occur in women over 25.

What are some common types of STDs?

- ◆ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) — AIDS is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), a virus that destroys the body's ability to fight off infection.
- ◆ Chlamydia — This is the most common of all STDs. Symptoms of this disease may include abnormal genital discharge and burning with urination.
- ◆ Genital Herpes — Herpes infections are caused by herpes simplex virus (HSV). The major symptoms of herpes infection are painful blisters or open sores in the genital area.
- ◆ Genital Warts — Genital warts are caused by a virus related to the virus that causes common skin warts.
- ◆ Gonorrhea — The most common symptoms of this disease are a discharge from the vagina or penis and painful or difficult urination.
- ◆ Syphilis — Symptoms of this disease may go undetected because they are very mild and disappear spontaneously. Symptoms may include painless sores on genitals, rectum, mouth or fingers, enlarged lymph nodes in the areas with the sores, skin rashes, fever, fatigue and loss of appetite. If left untreated, the infection will invade the internal organs, bones, the heart and the brain.
- ◆ Hepatitis B — This disease is extremely infectious and is commonly spread through sexual secretions and blood. It is an inflammation of the liver caused by the Hepatitis B virus. This disease is thought to be the leading cause of liver cancer.

What to Do If You Think You May Have an STD

- ◆ Notify all recent sex partners and urge them to get tested.
- ◆ Follow the doctor's orders and take all of the prescribed medication until gone. A follow-up test should be conducted to ensure that the infection has been cured.
- ◆ Avoid all sexual activity while being treated for an STD.

Tips for STD Prevention

- ◆ Think twice before beginning sexual relations with a new partner. Limiting sexual activity to only one partner reduces exposure to disease-causing organisms.
- ◆ When engaging in sexual intercourse, always use a male condom made of latex or polyurethane or a female condom made of polyurethane.
- ◆ Always use a spermicide with a condom for additional protection against STDs. Some condoms already contain spermicide. When they do not, spermicidal foam or gel can be inserted into the vagina.
- ◆ During oral sex, protect your mouth by having your partner use a condom.
- ◆ Ask your partner to wash their genitals before and after engaging in oral, vaginal or anal sex.
- ◆ Women should not douche after intercourse. It can spread an infection farther into the reproductive tract and wash away any spermicidal protection.
- ◆ Women should have annual Pap smears and tests for STDs.
- ◆ Learn to recognize the physical signs of STDs and inspect a partner's body, especially the genital area, for sores, rashes or discharges.
- ◆ If a woman is involved in an intimate relationship but wants to limit risk of STDs, she should try sexual activities other than intercourse, anal or oral sex. Women should consider mutual lovemaking techniques that do not involve the exchange of body fluids or contact between mucus membranes.
- ◆ Abstaining from all sexual contact is the only 100 percent reliable way of preventing sexually transmitted disease.

The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) urges women to contact their osteopathic family physician for advice on preserving good health for an active lifestyle. Osteopathic physicians (D.O.s), physicians

treating people, not just symptoms, are especially well qualified to assist in preventive healthcare since they are fully trained licensed physicians who have additional training that focuses on the body's structure and function, and its ability to heal itself. For more information visit the AOA's Web site at www.aoa-net.org.