



UO Student Health Center
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MORE THAN LOVE IS SWEEPING THE COUNTRY

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR HEALTH CENTER

THE STD EPIDEMIC

It's widely assumed that 'nice people' don't get STD's.

Yet the fact remains that sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) are the most widespread communicable diseases monitored by the U.S. Government. According to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, STD's are more common than measles, chicken pox, mumps and tuberculosis combined. They strike millions of Americans each year...and the effects can be devastating if left untreated.

What are STD's?

They are a group of contagious infections that are spread almost entirely by sexual contact. Until recently, the common name for STD's was venereal disease or VD. And most people were only aware of syphilis and gonorrhea. But today, we know that STD's encompass a much broader variety of specific illnesses.

A person could conceivably get an STD from an object or surface infected by a carrier of the disease. But this is highly unlikely. With the exception of viral hepatitis, the microorganisms that cause STD's are extremely fragile and cannot survive long outside the human body.

Doctors classify about 25 separate conditions as sexually transmitted disease, but the vast majority of cases result from six major illnesses.

AIDS

Thirty-thousand cases of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) have been reported since the disease was recognized in the U.S. in 1981. This rapid spread-plus the high mortality rate-have made AIDS one of the most dreaded STD's.

AIDS is caused by a virus that attacks the immune system, the body's natural defenses against disease. As a result, AIDS victims are susceptible to recurrent illnesses including pneumonia and unusual diseases rarely seen in healthy individuals.

The AIDS virus is most often spread by sexual contact, but it can also be passed by infected hypodermic needles and contaminated blood transfusions.

AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease that is reaching epidemic proportions in Oregon. This disease does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and ALL SEXUALLY ACTIVE PERSONS are at risk. According to the State of Oregon Health Division, encouraging the use of condoms is one of the most important ways we can slow the spread of the disease in our state.

At present there is no cure for AIDS, and more than 70 percent of the cases prove fatal within two years of diagnosis.

CHLAMYDIA

Chlamydia strikes at least three million Americans each year, making this bacterial infection the most widespread STD.

In males, chlamydia causes an inflammation of the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder. If left untreated, it can cause arthritis and sterility. In women, chlamydia will infect the cervix or fallopian tubes which can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (200,000 cases per year), as well as ectopic or tubal pregnancies and sterility. In addition, chlamydia can be passed from an infected woman to her child during birth resulting in an estimated 125,000 cases of infant chlamydia each year.

The danger of chlamydia is that it often produces no symptoms or is mistaken for another STD, such as gonorrhea. As a result, some victims never seek treatment or are treated for the wrong disease. The Health Center can test for chlamydia and treat this infection.

GONORRHEA

A major threat in the present epidemic of STD's, gonorrhea strikes from one to three million Americans every year. That translates to a new infection ever 12 seconds.

Gonorrhea is a bacterial infection that may lead to severe inflammation of the urinary tract in men. In women it can result in inflammation of the reproductive organs and potentially lead to sterility. Or it may spread to other parts of the body, resulting in crippling arthritis and liver damage.

The danger of severe complications from gonorrhea is greatest for women, since the early stages of the disease may produce no visible symptoms. Medical experts estimate that pelvic inflammatory disease, the most common complication of gonorrhea, afflicts 275,000 women each year, threatening them with abnormal pregnancies and sterility. The Health Center can test and treat for this infection.

GENITAL HERPES

An estimated 500,000 Americans get this disease every year. Genital herpes is usually caused by herpes simplex virus type 2, a relative of the virus that causes the common cold sore. No cure has been found for it. It lives in a person for the rest of his or her life, causing periodic eruptions of painful sores on the genitals. Herpes is most contagious when the sores are present and continues to be contagious until the sores are completely healed. While the long term effects of herpes are not yet known, there is evidence linking it to an increased risk of cervical cancer and to serious birth defects. For diagnosis, the Health Center has a culture test for herpes.

VIRAL HEPATITIS

Health officials estimate that 500,000 new cases of viral hepatitis occur each year. An inflammation of the liver, it can lead to chronic liver disease and sometimes can be fatal.

There are several forms of hepatitis caused by different viruses. All forms can be spread in nonsexual ways, such as contaminated water, food, and blood transfusions. However, sexual contact has been identified as one of the most common means of transmission for two types of viral hepatitis — hepatitis B and non-A, non-B hepatitis.

SYPHILIS

Once the most dreaded STD due to its disastrous long-term effects, syphilis caused 14,000 deaths in 1940. The mortality figure has since dropped below 200 per year, thanks to massive screening and treatment efforts.

Caused by a spirochete, a type of bacterium, syphilis attacks the nervous and cardiovascular systems and may lead to paralysis, blindness, insanity, disfigurement and eventual death. The disease can cause serious birth defects by damaging the skin, bone, eyes and liver of the fetus.

Perhaps the most dangerous thing about syphilis is the lack of serious symptoms early in the disease and the long period of time (one to 20 years) before serious and permanent damage to organs occurs.

WHO IS AT RISK OF GETTING AN STD?

Anyone who is sexually active is at some risk of infection. However, certain lifestyles expose some people to much greater risk than others. Celibate or monogamous lifestyles are the safest. On the other hand, frequent sexual contact with many different partners is a major risk factor for exposure to all types of STD's.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE AN STD?

That's the major obstacle to controlling STD's. Many victims don't even know they are infected, because symptoms are mild or non-existent. The AIDS virus causes no symptoms during an incubation period which can last 6 years or longer. Gonorrhea often produces no symptoms in women, except vaginal itching or discharge. Chlamydia may cause only minor burning or discomfort during urination. Viral hepatitis may cause only mild fatigue and fever. The symptoms of herpes may be mistaken for other types of skin rashes.

If your sexual partner is diagnosed as having an STD, you may be infected, too. See a physician for a checkup, even if you have no symptoms.

HOW CAN STD'S BE CONTROLLED?

As long as there is sexual contact between humans, there will be the potential to spread STD's. However, health officials recommend a number of steps for controlling these diseases.

EARLY MEDICAL TESTING.

If you think you have an STD, get a diagnosis immediately from your physician or at the Health Center. Tests for STD's are simple, inexpensive, fast, and relatively painless. However, they are not generally included in a routine medical examination. You have to ask for them. Particularly if you are a woman (since female symptoms of gonorrhea and chlamydia are so often mild), be sure that STD tests are included in your regular medical checkups. At the Health Center, the routine pap test includes a screen for chlamydia and gonorrhea.

APPROPRIATE TREATMENT

If an STD test is positive, various types of treatment are available. In most cases, gonorrhea can be cured with penicillin or erythromycin. Tetracycline and erythromycin are effective against chlamydia, while penicillin works against syphilis.

Scientists have not yet developed a cure for herpes, viral hepatitis, or AIDS.

PREVENTION

The use of condoms by males can reduce the chances of catching or transmitting STD's. On the other hand, use of birth control pills does not prevent the spread of STD's.

Persons who know they have an STD should consult with their physician or the Health Center before resuming sexual relations. And everyone can adopt a lifestyle that lowers his or her STD risk. This includes refraining from sex with many partners, and avoiding sex with partners who do not take precautions such as using condoms.

* Information provided by the Health Center and from a pamphlet by Abbot Laboratories.