

Teens,  
Sexually Transmitted Diseases  
& HIV / AIDS



By  
AVERT

## What are STDs?

STD stands for Sexually Transmitted Disease (sometimes called Sexually Transmitted Infection). This is an infection which can be caught by having sexual contact with someone who is infected. This can be vaginal, oral or anal sex, although other types of touching can pass some STDs - for example, some STDs (such as Herpes and HPV) can be caught by touching the infected areas of someone's body and then touching your own genitals (private parts). There are quite a lot of different STDs.

## Aren't STDs only a problem for older people who sleep around?

No. In fact, some STDs like chlamydia and gonorrhoea are actually more common among teens than among older men and women. And you don't have to sleep around to get an STD, although it can increase your chances of having sex with someone with an STD.

STDs are a big problem, and they're getting bigger. In the UK, for example, syphilis infections among men rose by 960% over the past five years. So you can't be too careful!

## So how can I protect myself?

Using condoms during vaginal, oral and anal sex will help to protect you. You could also use a female condom (although you shouldn't use both male and female condoms together). However, some STDs (such as oral herpes) can be transmitted in other ways, such as kissing. You shouldn't have sexual contact with anyone who has visible sores or genital rashes.

You can only catch an STD by having sexual contact with someone else who already has an STD. This means that someone who does not have an STD can't infect you, and you can't infect yourself.

## What is 'safe sex'?

Safe sex means sexual activities which you can do even if one person is infected with HIV, and they definitely won't pass it on to the other person. Loads of activities are completely safe. You can kiss, cuddle, massage and rub each other's bodies. But if you have any cuts or sores on your skin, make sure they are covered with plasters (band-aids). Nothing you do on your own can cause you to get HIV - you can't infect yourself by masturbation.

## What is safer sex?

Safer sexual activities are things that aren't always completely safe, but are when you've taken precautions to reduce the risks. An example of this is using condoms. Using a condom is not absolutely safe as condoms can break, but condoms can be effective if they are used correctly. To find out more about this, see our condoms page on our website – [www.avert.org](http://www.avert.org)

Oral sex (one person kissing, licking or sucking the sexual areas of another person) does carry some risk of infection. If a person sucks the penis of an infected man, for example, infected fluid could get into the mouth. The virus could then get into the blood if you have bleeding gums or tiny sores somewhere in the mouth. The same is true if infected sexual fluids from a woman get into the mouth of her partner. But infection from oral sex alone seems to be very rare.

If you inject drugs, you should always use a clean needle, syringe and spoon, water, etc each time you inject, and never share any of these with anyone else. If you snort drugs, and you use a note or a straw to snort through, you shouldn't share it with anyone else, as blood can be passed from the inside of one person's nose to another.

If you have a tattoo or a piercing, you should make sure that the needles and equipment used are sterile. Ask the staff at the place you have it done about what precautions they use.

## Can you get infected your first time?

Yes, if your partner has a STD and you have unsafe sex, then you can become infected.

## How can I tell if someone has an STD?

You can't. Some people with STDs may have symptoms that you can see, but many people have no symptoms at all. Someone could have an STD and have no symptoms for months or even years, but still be infectious. Using condoms correctly will reduce your risk of infection.

## How do I know if I've got an STD?

Different STDs have different symptoms, and some of them have no symptoms at all, so you won't always be able to tell if you have one. For example, chlamydia in women is often symptom-less, and it's so common that in the UK the government is recommending that all sexually active women under 25 should be tested for it.

## But I've got some symptoms – should I worry?

If you've got any sort of rash, sores or spots on or around your genitals, it's always a good idea to get it checked out by a doctor. Here's a list of some of the most common STDs and their symptoms. Just remember – symptoms may be different in different people, so if you're worried – have a test!

## Sexually Transmitted Diseases

### Gonorrhoea

**Incubation period :** Symptoms of infection may show up at anytime between 1 and 14 days after exposure, but sometimes there are no symptoms at all. Men are much more likely than women to have symptoms.

**Symptoms :**

**Women – symptoms can include :**

- a change in vaginal discharge. This may increase, change to a yellow or greenish colour and develop a strong smell
- a pain or burning sensation when passing urine
- irritation and/or discharge from the anus

**Men - symptoms may include:**

- a yellow or white discharge from the penis
- irritation and/or discharge from the anus
- inflammation of the testicles and prostate gland

**Transmission :** Gonorrhoea is usually transmitted by unprotected penetrative sex, but can occasionally be transmitted by touching someone else's genitals and then touching your own without washing your hands.

**Treatment :** Treatment is easy and essential. You will be given an antibiotic in tablet, liquid or injection form.

## Chlamydia

Time between infection and first symptoms: Symptoms often show up 1 to 3 weeks after infection, but can be much longer, and can show up at any time. There can be no symptoms at all.

Symptoms :

Women : Most women will have no symptoms at all. If there are symptoms, they may include

- a slight increase in vaginal discharge - caused by the cervix becoming inflamed
- a need to pass urine more often/pain on passing urine
- lower abdominal pain
- pain during sex
- irregular menstrual bleeding
- a painful swelling and irritation in the eyes (if they are infected)

Men : Men are more likely to notice symptoms than women, but some men may have no symptoms either.

- a discharge from the penis which may be white/cloudy and stain underwear
- pain and/or a burning sensation when passing urine
- a painful swelling and irritation in the eyes (if they are infected) Chlamydia in the rectum rarely causes symptoms.

Transmission : Having unprotected sex with someone who's infected. Children can become infected during childbirth.

Treatment : Treatment is easy and essential. You will be given an antibiotic in tablet, liquid or injection form. It is important that you finish any course of treatment for chlamydia . If treatment is interrupted, it may be necessary to start again from the beginning.

## Syphilis

Time between infection and first symptoms : Symptoms can be difficult to recognise and can take up to three months to develop. On average, symptoms first appear within 21 days of infection.

Symptoms : Symptoms are similar in both men and women. Usually, the first symptom of syphilis is a painless sore which appears on the place where the bacteria entered the body. Usually, this is on the vaginal lips, clitoris, around the urethra or on the cervix. In men, they may be on the penis or foreskin, and in both sexes they may be around the anus or mouth.

Transmission : Having unprotected sex with someone who's infected. Children can become infected during childbirth.

Treatment : Treatment for syphilis is usually a 2-week course of penicillin injections or, in some cases, antibiotic tablets or capsules.

## Herpes

There are two types of the genital herpes virus. Either type is infectious, but: Type I infects the mouth or nose. It is more likely to recur than if Type II infects this area. Type II infects the genital and anal area, it is more likely to recur than if Type I infects this area.

Genital and anal infections used to always be caused by Type II, but Type I is becoming more common in these areas, because more people are having oral sex.

Time between infection and first symptoms: usually between one and 26 days between infection and first symptoms.

Symptoms :

- an itching or tingling sensation in the genital or anal area
- small fluid-filled blisters. These burst and leave small sores which can be very painful. In time they dry out, scab over and heal. With the first infection they can take between 2 and 4 weeks to heal properly
- pain when passing urine, if it passes over any of the open sores
- a flu-like illness, backache, headache, swollen glands or fever

At this time, the virus is highly infectious.

The virus can recur at other times throughout your life, often when you're stressed or run down. The sores are fewer, smaller, less painful and heal more quickly, and there are no flu-like symptoms, but the virus is still infectious at these times.

Transmission :

Genital herpes is passed on through skin contact with an infected person. The virus affects the areas where it enters the body. This can be by:

- kissing (mouth to mouth)
- penetrative sex (when the penis enters the vagina, mouth or anus)
- oral sex (from the mouth to the genitals)

Treatment : Treatment is not essential, as genital herpes will clear up by itself. Tablets are available which reduce the severity of genital herpes infection. These are only effective when taken within 72 hours of the start of the symptoms. Recurrent infections often do not require treatment. Herpes cannot be cured – the virus always remains in the body – but some people never have another attack.

## Genital Warts (HPV)

Time between infection and first symptoms: After you have been infected with the virus it usually takes between 1 and 3 months for warts to appear on your genitals

Symptoms : You may notice pinkish/white small lumps or larger cauliflower-shaped lumps on the genital area. Warts can appear around the vulva, the penis, the scrotum or the anus. They may occur singly or in groups. They may itch, but are usually painless. Often there are no other symptoms, and the warts may be difficult to see. In women genital warts can develop inside the vagina and on the cervix. If a woman has warts on her cervix, this may cause slight bleeding or, very rarely, an unusual coloured vaginal discharge.

Not everyone who comes into contact with the virus will develop warts.

Transmission : Genital warts are spread through skin-to-skin contact. If you have sex or genital contact with someone who has genital warts you may develop them too.

They can be passed on during vaginal or anal sex.

Treatment : As genital warts are caused by a virus and not a bacteria, antibiotics will not get rid of them.

A common treatment is a brown liquid (podophyllin) which is painted on to the wart(s) and must be washed off 4 hours later (or sooner, if the area is irritated). The clinic may prescribe podophylotoxin for use at home. Another common treatment is freezing the warts or laser treatment. Often more than one kind of treatment is necessary before the warts are gone.

These treatments may be uncomfortable, but they should not be painful. If your treatment hurts, tell the doctor. Never try to treat genital warts by yourself – always seek medical advice.

## What about HIV?

HIV is passed on in the sexual fluids or blood of an infected person, so if infected blood or sexual fluid gets into your body, you can become infected. This usually happens by either having sexual intercourse with an infected person or by sharing needles used to inject drugs with an infected person. People can also become infected by being born to a mother who has HIV and a very small number of people become infected by having medical treatment using infected blood transfusions.

HIV can't be caught by kissing, hugging or shaking hands with an infected person, and it can't be transmitted by sneezes, door handles or dirty glasses.

Like other STDs, HIV is a big problem for young people, as well as adults. In 2002, it was estimated that there were 3.2 million teens under 15 living with HIV.

Monica "I am 15 years old and my best friend who is a male has AIDS and we were really close so one night we experimented and after the fact that we "did it" he told me that he had AIDS."

Not everyone who is infected with HIV will have symptoms, so many people who have the virus don't know about it. Often, however, people who feel flu-like symptoms shortly after becoming infected. If you've had a risky sexual encounter, though, and you're worried – have a test. You can't diagnose yourself!

## What's the difference between HIV and AIDS?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. AIDS is a serious condition in which the body's defences against some illnesses are broken down. This means that people with AIDS can get many different kinds of diseases which a healthy person's body would normally fight off quite easily.

## How long does it take for HIV to cause AIDS?

The length of time between being infected with HIV and being diagnosed with AIDS depends on lots of different things. These days, there are many drugs that can be used to help people with HIV, and most doctors believe that a lot of people can be treated for a very long time. Many people do not know exactly when they were infected with HIV, and the length of time between this happening and them being diagnosed with AIDS can be very variable.

## Is there a cure?

There is no cure for HIV. HIV is a virus, and no cure has been found for any type of virus. Recently, doctors have been able to control the virus once a person is infected, which means that a person with HIV can stay healthy for longer, but they have not managed to get rid of the virus in the body completely.



## How can I tell if someone's infected with HIV?

There is no way to tell just by looking at someone whether they are infected with HIV. Someone can be infected but have no symptoms and still look perfectly healthy. They might also feel perfectly healthy and not know themselves that they are infected. The only way to know if a person is infected or not is if they have a blood test.

## I think I've caught something! What should I do?

If you have any strange symptoms or if someone you've had sexual contact with has an STD, then you should have a test immediately.

Most of the symptoms of STDs can be found either on the genitals or in and around the mouth.

If you think you have an STD you should have a test and get treatment. Untreated STDs can be dangerous - if you don't get help, you may not be able to have children later in life, or it can increase your risk of cancer. You may also pass it on to your partner.

## Who can I talk to?

It may help you to talk to an adult - perhaps a parent, school nurse or teacher may be able to advise you where you can have a test. Or you could ask your family doctor. There are details of helplines and testing centres on our links page. It's much better to talk to someone than to worry on your own.

## I'm too shy to go to a clinic!

Don't worry. The doctors and nurses who work there are professionals and they do this all the time. It can be embarrassing to go to your doctor or a clinic and explain that you've got a rash or a sore, but it's much better to sort these things out sooner than later – some STDs can be harmful if you don't have treatment quickly.

## Will they tell my parents?

Most (but not all) clinics have a confidentiality policy, and will not tell anyone, although some places will want you to bring a parent to give consent. You can phone the clinic before you go and find out.

## What will they do?

If you are being tested for HIV, the clinic will ask you to wait at least three months after your last risky sexual encounter before having the test – HIV can't be detected when you've first been infected. They may take a urine sample, a blood sample or a swab from the vagina or penis. Not all the tests need you to have a physical examination, and you might not even have to undress. Ask what they are testing for - it may be a good idea to be tested for everything, if you can. Some places can give you the results on the same day, in other places you may have to wait for a week or more. While you wait, you shouldn't have sexual contact with anyone.

If you find that you do have an STD, it's important that you don't pass on the infection to anyone else. Don't have sexual contact with anyone until you have been treated and are no longer infectious.

If you think that you may already have passed on the infection to someone else, it is important that you tell them so that they can have a test, too. If the clinic gives you antibiotics or medication, make sure that you follow the instructions and complete the course of treatment - otherwise the STD may come back.

## I'm still worried – what should I do

You can get more help, advice and information from the helplines below.

US National AIDS hotline – 1-800-342-AIDS

UK Health Initiatives for Youth - 0800 298 3099

UK National AIDS Helpline - 0800 567 123

More about HIV, STDs, condoms and testing can be found on our website :

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

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