

## Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually transmitted diseases, or venereal diseases, are passed through sexual contact.

This includes sexual intercourse, contact of the mouth with the genitals or anus, and contact of the hands to the genitals. Using latex condoms can reduce the chances of being infected with or passing on some STDs. The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), and some kinds of hepatitis can be sexually transmitted. (HIV/AIDS is discussed in detail in the textbook.) STDs are very common. They can cause serious health problems. Residents may be unaware of or embarrassed by symptoms of an STD.

**Chlamydia** infection is caused by organisms in the mucous membranes of the reproductive tract. Chlamydia can cause serious infection. It can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in women. PID can cause sterility. Signs of chlamydia infection are yellow or white discharge from the penis or vagina and burning with urination. It is treated with antibiotics.

**Syphilis** can be treated effectively in the early stages. If left untreated, it can cause brain damage, mental illness, and even death. Babies born to mothers with syphilis may be born blind or with other serious birth defects. Syphilis is easier to detect in men than in women. This is due to open sores called chancres that form on the penis soon after infection. The chancres are painless and can go unnoticed. If untreated, the infection spreads to the heart, brain, and other vital organs. Common symptoms at this stage include rash, sore throat, or fever. When detected, syphilis can be treated with penicillin or other antibiotics. The sooner it is treated, the better the chances of preventing long-term damages and avoiding infection of others.

**Gonorrhea**, like syphilis, can be treated with antibiotics. It is easier to detect in men than in women. If untreated, gonorrhea can cause sterility. Most women with gonorrhea show no early symptoms. This makes it easy for women to spread the disease. Men with gonorrhea will often show a greenish or yellowish discharge from the penis within a week after infection. Burning with urination is another common symptom in men.

**Herpes simplex II**, unlike the other STDs discussed here, is caused by a virus. It cannot be treated with antibiotics. Once infected with the herpes virus, a person cannot be cured.

The person may have repeated outbreaks of the disease for the rest of his or her life. A herpes outbreak includes burning, painful, red sores on the genitals. These heal in about two weeks. The sores are infectious. A person with herpes virus can also spread the infection when sores are not present. Some people infected with herpes never have repeated outbreaks. The later episodes may not be as painful as the first outbreak. Antiviral drugs can help people stay symptom-free longer.