



E-ISSN: 2788-9270

P-ISSN: 2788-9262

[www.pharmajournal.net](http://www.pharmajournal.net)

NJPS 2024; 4(2): 01-04

Received: 06-04-2024

Accepted: 08-05-2024

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## Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs): A critical public health concern

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### Abstract

A rise in the rates of sexually transmitted diseases, both worldwide and in Germany, has been observed especially among persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Since many infections are devoid of symptoms or cause few symptoms, the diseases are detected late, may spread unchecked, and be transmitted unwittingly. In the event of persistent infection, the effects depend on the pathogen in question. Manifestations vary widely, ranging from pelvic inflammatory disease, most often caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis* (in Germany nearly 30% of PID) or *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* (in Germany <2% of PID), to the development of genital warts or cervical dysplasia in cases of infection with the HP virus. Causal treatment does exist in most cases and should always be administered to the sexual partner(s) as well. An infection during pregnancy calls for an individual treatment approach, depending on the pathogen and the week of pregnancy.

**Keywords:** Sexually transmitted diseases, *Chlamydia trachomatis*, condyloma, pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility

### Introduction

According to the WHO, more than a million sexually transmitted infections (STI) are diagnosed every day throughout the world. On average, every year 374 million persons contract a new infection with one of four leading sexually transmitted pathogens: *Chlamydia trachomatis*, *Trichomonas vaginalis*, *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, or human papillomaviruses.

In the USA and in Germany, an increasing number of infections have been observed especially among adolescents and young adults between the ages of 15 and 24 years.

The transmission routes of viruses, bacteria, fungi, or parasites in connection with sexual intercourse usually occurs through the exchange of infectious fluids or through direct skin contact. However, many of these infections remain asymptomatic for a long period of time and are thus transmitted unwittingly or become persistent. This may cause long-term complications such as the pelvic inflammatory disease syndrome (PID), cervical dysplasia, or sterility. The gynecologist is then confronted with these conditions.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), are infections that are passed from one person to another through sexual contact. They are usually spread during vaginal, oral, or anal sex. But sometimes they can spread through other sexual contact involving the penis, vagina, mouth, or anus. This is because some STIs, like herpes and HPV, are spread by skin-to-skin contact.

Some STIs can be passed from a pregnant person to the baby, either during pregnancy or when giving birth. Other ways that some STIs may be spread include during breastfeeding, through blood transfusions, or by sharing needles.

### There are more than 20 types of STIs, including

Chlamydia  
Genital herpes  
Gonorrhea  
HIV  
HPV  
Pubic lice  
Syphilis  
Trichomoniasis

### Symptoms

STDs can have a range of symptoms, including no symptoms. That's why sexually transmitted infections may go unnoticed until a person has complications or a partner is diagnosed.

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**STI symptoms might include**

- Sores or bumps on the genitals or in the oral or rectal area.
- Painful or burning urination.
- Discharge from the penis.
- Unusual or odorous vaginal discharge.
- Unusual vaginal bleeding.
- Pain during sex.
- Sore, swollen lymph nodes, particularly in the groin but sometimes more widespread.
- Lower abdominal pain.
- Fever.
- Rash over the trunk, hands or feet.

Sexually transmitted infection symptoms may appear a few days after exposure. But it may take years before you have any noticeable problems, depending on what's causing the STI.

**Causes**

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are caused by various pathogens, including:

**1. Bacteria**

- Chlamydia (*Chlamydia trachomatis*)
- Gonorrhea (*Neisseria gonorrhoeae*)
- Syphilis (*Treponema pallidum*)

**2. Viruses**

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
- Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV)
- Hepatitis B (HBV)

**3. Parasites**

- Pubic lice (*Phthirus pubis*)
- Scabies (*Sarcoptes scabiei*)

**STDs can be spread through**

1. Vaginal Intercourse
2. Anal sex
3. Oral sex
4. Sharing of sex toys
5. Mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding (for some STDs)

**Risk factors for getting an STD include**

1. Unprotected sex
2. Multiple sexual partners
3. Previous history of STDs
4. Age (15-24 years old)
5. Substance abuse

It's essential to practice safe sex, get regularly tested, and maintain open communication with sexual partners to prevent and manage STDs.

**Types of STDs**

There are many types of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Here are some common ones:

1. Chlamydia
2. Gonorrhea
3. Syphilis
4. Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV) - Type 1 (cold sores) and

Type 2 (genital herpes)

5. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
6. Human Papillomavirus (HPV) - can cause genital warts and cervical cancer
7. Hepatitis B (HBV) - can cause liver disease and liver cancer
8. Genital Warts (HPV)
9. Pubic Lice (Crabs)
10. Scabies

It's important to note that some STDs may not have symptoms, so regular testing is crucial for early detection and treatment. Using condoms and practicing safe sex can help prevent the spread of STDs.

**Prevention**

Preventing STDs involves a combination of behaviors and strategies. Here are some effective ways to prevent STDs:

1. **Use condoms and dental dams:** Consistently use male and female condoms and dental dams for oral, vaginal, and anal sex.
2. **Mutual monogamy:** Maintain a long-term, exclusive relationship with a tested partner.
3. **Get vaccinated:** Receive vaccines for HPV, Hepatitis A and B, and HIV (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis or PrEP).
4. **Practice safe oral sex:** Use condoms or dental dams for oral sex.
5. **Get tested regularly:** Regularly test for STDs, especially if you have multiple partners.
6. **Use pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP):** Take daily medication to prevent HIV infection.
7. **Avoid alcohol and drugs:** Avoid substance use, which can increase risky behavior.
8. **Communicate with your partner:** Discuss sexual history, testing, and consent before engaging in sexual activities.
9. **Use male and female condoms correctly:** Learn proper usage to maximize effectiveness.
10. **Limit sexual partners:** Reduce the number of sexual partners to minimize risk.
11. **Use contraceptive methods:** Use birth control methods like hormonal contraceptives or intrauterine devices (IUDs).
12. **Avoid sharing sex toys:** Use separate sex toys or clean them thoroughly after use.

Remember, prevention is key! By following these guidelines, you can significantly reduce the risk of contracting STDs.

**Diagnosis and Treatment of STDs**

Diagnosing STDs involves a combination of physical examination, medical history, and laboratory tests. Here are some common methods:

1. **Physical Examination:** Visual inspection of genital areas, anus, and mouth for lesions, warts, or discharge.
2. **Blood Tests:** Drawn blood is tested for antibodies or antigens to detect infections like HIV, Syphilis, and Hepatitis.
3. **Urine Tests:** Urine samples are tested for bacterial infections like Chlamydia and Gonorrhea.
4. **Swab Tests:** Swabs collect fluid or discharge from the genital area, anus, or throat to test for infections.

5. **Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests (NAATs):** Detect genetic material from infections like Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and HPV.
6. **Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Tests:** Similar to NAATs, detect genetic material from infections.
7. **Rapid Point-of-Care Tests:** Quick tests for HIV, Syphilis, and other infections using blood or swab samples.
8. **Biopsy:** A sample of tissue is examined for abnormal cell growth, like genital warts or cancer.
9. **Pap Smear:** A test for cervical cancer and precancerous cells.
10. **STD Panels:** Comprehensive tests that screen for multiple STDs simultaneously.

#### It's essential to consult a healthcare provider for testing and diagnosis if you:

- Have symptoms or signs of an STD
- Have been exposed to an STD
- Are sexually active and want routine testing
- Are pregnant or planning to become pregnant

Early detection and treatment can prevent long-term complications and transmission to others.

Treatment of STDs depends on the specific infection and may include:

1. **Antibiotics:** For bacterial infections like Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Syphilis, and Bacterial Vaginosis.
2. **Antiviral medications:** For viral infections like Herpes, HIV, and Hepatitis.
3. **Antifungal medications:** For fungal infections like Candidiasis (yeast infection).
4. **Antiparasitic medications:** For parasitic infections like Pubic Lice and Scabies.
5. **Topical creams or ointments:** For skin manifestations like genital warts and herpes lesions.
6. **Injections:** For infections like Hepatitis and HPV.
7. **Oral medications:** For infections like Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, and Herpes.
8. **Home remedies:** For symptom relief, like painful urination or vaginal discharge.

#### It's essential to

- Complete the full treatment course as prescribed.
- Inform sexual partners and encourage them to get tested and treated.
- Follow up with healthcare providers to ensure the infection has been fully treated.
- Practice safe sex to prevent reinfection.

Some STDs, like HIV, require ongoing management and treatment. It's crucial to work with a healthcare provider to develop a treatment plan.

Remember, early treatment can prevent long-term complications and reduce transmission risk.

If you suspect you have an STD or have been exposed, seek medical attention promptly.

#### Conclusion

In conclusion, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are a significant public health concern, affecting millions of people worldwide. It's essential to understand the causes, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of STDs to maintain good sexual health.

- STDs can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites.
- Symptoms may be absent or mild, making testing crucial.
- Diagnosis involves physical examination, medical history, and laboratory tests.
- Treatment varies depending on the infection, and completion of the full treatment course is essential.
- Prevention methods include safe sex practices, vaccination, and mutual monogamy.- Early detection and treatment can prevent long-term complications and transmission to others.

Remember, sexual health is an essential aspect of overall well-being. By being informed and proactive, you can protect yourself and your partners from STDs. If you have any concerns or questions, don't hesitate to reach out to a healthcare provider. Stay safe and healthy!

STDs are a critical public health concern, and it's essential to recognize their importance. Here are some key reasons why STDs matter:

1. **Physical and emotional impact:** STDs can cause significant physical and emotional suffering, affecting quality of life and well-being.
2. **Infectiousness:** STDs can be transmitted to others, potentially leading to widespread health issues.
3. **Complications and sequelae:** Untreated STDs can lead to serious complications, such as infertility, chronic pain, and increased risk of cancer.
4. **Pregnancy and childbirth risks:** STDs can pose significant risks to pregnant individuals and their babies, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and congenital infections.
5. **HIV and AIDS:** If left untreated, HIV can progress to AIDS, a life-threatening condition.
5. **Economic burden:** STDs impose a significant economic burden on individuals, communities, and healthcare systems.
6. **Social and stigma issues:** STDs often carry social stigma, leading to secrecy, shame, and delayed treatment-seeking.
7. **Public health concerns:** STDs are a public health priority, requiring surveillance, education, and prevention efforts.
8. **Global impact:** STDs affect people worldwide, with varying prevalence and access to care.
9. **Importance of awareness and education:** Understanding STDs is crucial for prevention, early detection, and effective management.
10. Remember, acknowledging the importance of STDs is the first step towards addressing these significant health concerns.

#### STDS current cases in India

Here are some statistics on sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV in India: - In 2023, the number of people living with HIV in India was estimated to be around 3.14 million.

- India's AIDS prevalence rate was approximately 0.30 percent in 2016.
- The main factors that have led to a high number of HIV cases in India are labor migration and low literacy levels in rural parts of the country.
- The Indian government has expressed concerns about the spread of HIV through the use of intravenous drugs and prostitution.

- Andhra Pradesh, Chandigarh, Delhi, Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur and Mizoram have the highest rates of HIV among the population.

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