

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

What are STDs?

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are infections you can get through sexual contact: vaginal, oral, or anal. **More than 20 STDs** have been identified so far. Table 1 lists some of the most common ones.

With more than **15 million new cases in the United States each year**, STD's are more common than most people think. Young people have a particularly high risk. In fact, each year **1 out of 4 sexually active teen gets an STD**.

Most STDs are easily cured if they are detected early. Unfortunately, many people don't seek treatment because they have no symptoms and thus do not even know they have an infection. Other people have symptoms, but do not go to the doctor because they are too embarrassed or do not realize that their symptoms are a warning sign of a serious infection. This is tragic, because untreated STDs can cause severe health problems and may even result in death. Also, when left untreated, they are likely to continue spreading from one person to another.

Laboratory tests can help your doctor detect most STDs, but these infections cannot be diagnosed unless you decide to seek medical help.

Table 1. Frequency of STDs in the United States

STD	New cases each year in the US
Human papillomavirus (HPV)	5.5 million
Trichomoniasis	5 million
Chlamydia	3 million
Genital herpes	1 million
Gonorrhea	650,000
Hepatitis B	80,000
Hepatitis C	40,000
HIV/AIDS	40,000
Syphilis	35,600

Important facts about STDs

- ◆ Your risk of acquiring an STD begins the first time you have sex. The more partners you have, the greater your risk.
- ◆ In women, STDs can lead to cancer, infertility, long-term pain, and ectopic pregnancy (a pregnancy in which the fetus grows outside the womb).
- ◆ Men can also suffer long-term problems, such as infertility, heart disease, and arthritis.
- ◆ Mothers can pass STDs onto their babies before, during, or after birth.
- ◆ Some STDs are not curable and stay with you for life.

Early diagnosis and treatment can either cure you or help you avoid most of the serious complications.

Do I have an STD?

Understanding the symptoms of STDs and how they are transmitted is the first step to early treatment and prevention. Here is a quick guide to the most common symptoms of STDs and the specific diseases that may be causing them: *

Symptom	STD
Unusual discharge from penis, vagina or anus	Chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis, yeast infection
Bumps, blisters, or warts on penis, vagina or anus	Herpes, HPV
Painless sores on mouth, penis or vagina	Syphilis
Jaundice (yellow skin), fatigue, and abdominal pain	Viral hepatitis
Pain or burning sensation during urination or sex	Trichomoniasis, herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhea
Itching or burning around penis, vagina or anus	Herpes, pubic lice (crabs), trichomoniasis, yeast infection
Yellow-green discharge from vagina with a strong odor	Trichomoniasis
Flu-like symptoms	HIV/AIDS, herpes, syphilis
Abdominal pain	Chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis, hepatitis
Bleeding between periods	Chlamydia
Unexplained weight loss	HIV/AIDS

*Although these are the most common symptoms of STDs, there can be others. In addition, many of the symptoms above can be caused by diseases and conditions that are not sexually transmitted. It is important that you discuss any symptoms with your doctor right away, so that they can determine the cause and begin treatment.

How can I reduce my risk of getting or passing on an STD?

The only way to be sure you will not get an STD is abstinence (not having sex). If you do have sex, limit your risk by practicing “safer” sex:

- ◆ Use a latex condom every time you have sex, even oral sex. But remember that condoms must be used properly to prevent STDs, and even proper use does not ensure you won't be infected. Some STDs, such as herpes, HPV, and syphilis can be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact in areas the condom does not cover.
- ◆ Limit the number of people with whom you have sex and don't go back and forth between partners. It is safest to have only one partner (one who does not have an STD).
- ◆ Before you have sex with a new partner, ask if he or she has an STD or any unusual symptoms. If so, do not have sex until you are sure the infection is cured or you learn how to protect yourself.
- ◆ Be open and honest about STDs with your partner. If either of you has an STD, both of you should be tested and treated if necessary. Otherwise, you could repeatedly pass the infection back and forth to each other.
- ◆ Both you and your partner need to be treated for STDs. Otherwise, you may become infected again.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor about your risk of getting an STD and ways to avoid it.

How can Sonora Quest Laboratories help?

Sonora Quest Laboratories performs tests on blood, urine and other specimens to help your doctor diagnose infections quickly and accurately. Sonora Quest Laboratories offers a full range of STD tests, carefully evaluating each to assure that you receive the best test available. Below are just a few of the innovative STD tests Sonora Quest Laboratories offers:

- ◆ **HPV testing** – Quest Diagnostics DNA-based HPV test helps identify high-risk types of HPV, the kind that can lead to cervical cancer. This test may be used as a follow-up to the ThinPrep Pap Test.
- ◆ **ThinPrep Pap Test** – The first major improvement to the Pap test in 50 years, the ThinPrep Pap Test for cervical cancer screening provides laboratories with specimens that are easier to examine. The benefit to you? Earlier detection of precancerous cells. Your doctor can also ask us to perform HPV testing on the same specimen that was collected for the ThinPrep Pap Test, so you only have to have one sample taken.
- ◆ **Chlamydia and gonorrhea testing** - Sonora Quest Laboratories uses state-of-the-art molecular technology to provide reliable, accurate test results. In some cases urine can be used instead of a vaginal or urethral swab, making sample collection easy and painless.
- ◆ **Herpes Culture and HerpeSelect** – These tests may assist your doctor in detecting herpes infections and distinguishing between HSV-1 and HSV-2.