

LEARN ABOUT

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)



This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider

Overview

- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) happen when someone becomes infected with a sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- STIs are usually spread through sexual contact
- They are caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites, and spread through body fluids like blood, semen, or vaginal fluids
- Or in other ways, like from a mother to her baby during pregnancy or birth, by sharing needles, or through a blood transfusion
- A person can have an STI and not know it because there may be no symptoms
- Even if someone looks healthy, they can still pass on the infection to another person

Symptoms

STDs can cause many different symptoms, or no symptoms at all. This is why someone may not realize they have an STI until health problems develop or a partner is diagnosed.

Possible symptoms include:

- Sores or bumps on the genitals, mouth, or rectal area
- Pain or burning when urinating
- Discharge from the penis
- Unusual or foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Unusual vaginal bleeding
- Pain during sex
- Swollen or sore lymph nodes, especially in the groin
- Pain in the lower belly
- Fever
- Rash on the body, hands, or feet

Symptoms may show up a few days after infection but can also take years for problems to appear in some cases.

When to See a Doctor

- You are sexually active and think you might have been exposed to an STI
- You have symptoms of an STI

Make an appointment:

- Before you start having sex with a new partner
- When you're thinking about becoming sexually active, or by age 21