

Understanding STDs

April is Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) awareness month. STDs, also called Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), are infections passed from one person to another through sexual activity.

Why is it important to understand STDs ?

It is important to understand STDs in order to prevent the spread. Cases of STDs are at an all-time high across the country. STDs can affect anyone, regardless of age or background, but are especially common in youth. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 2 million cases of the three nationally reported STDs – chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis – were reported in the United States in 2016, the highest number ever.

How do STDs spread?

Anyone who is sexually active can get an STD. STDs, such as herpes or genital warts can even be spread by skin-to-skin contact with infected areas. Individuals can have an STD, and not know they are infected, spreading it to their partner. STDs can also be spread from a pregnant or breastfeeding mother to her baby.

How do you know if you have a STD:

Many STDs do not have symptoms. STDs are diagnosed through a physical exam and/or laboratory testing. The only way to know you do not have a STD is to be tested. Getting tested and getting the appropriate treatment for STDs is important, because if left untreated, STDs can cause serious health consequences.

Can STDs be cured?

Some STDs are caused by bacteria and can be treated, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. Other STDs are caused by a virus and have no cure, such as herpes and genital warts. Medical providers may prescribe medication to relieve the symptoms, but you will always be a carrier of the virus.

How are STDs prevented?

Abstinence is the only sure way to prevent STDs. There are other steps that can be taken to help prevent the spread of STDs.

- Use condoms. Using a condom every time decreases the chances of infection.
- Get tested. Be sure you and your partner are tested for STDs prior to becoming sexually active.
- Get vaccinated. There are vaccines to protect against genital warts and hepatitis B.
- Be monogamous. Having sex with just one partner can lower your risk for STDs.
- Limit number of sex partners. The risk of STDs increases with the number of sex partners.
- Do not abuse alcohol or drugs. Substance use increases risky behavior and potential exposure to STDs.

It is important to talk to your medical provider about the risk of STDs and getting tested.

