

# The Ins and Outs of Sexually Transmitted Infections



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**  
Division of Public Health

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# Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)

(BAK·TEE·REE·UHL VA·JUH·NO·SUHS)



Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is a condition that happens when there is too much of certain bacteria (tiny single-celled organisms) in the vagina. It is a result of an imbalance of “good” and “harmful” bacteria in the vagina or a change in the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina. BV is associated with having multiple male or female sex partners, a new sex partner, douching, or lack of condom use.

Douching (washing or cleaning out the inside of the vagina with water or other mixtures of fluids), not using condoms, and having new or multiple sex partners can upset the normal balance of vaginal bacteria, increasing your risk of getting BV. Having BV can increase your chances of getting other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

## **SYMPTOMS**

Many people with BV do not have symptoms. If you do have symptoms, you may notice:

- A thin white or gray vaginal discharge
- Pain, itching, or burning in the vagina.
- A strong fish-like odor, especially after sex
- Burning when peeing
- Itching around the outside of the vagina

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

There is no vaccine for bacterial vaginosis. If you have symptoms, you should get checked and treated by a health care provider. Antibiotics (medicine that blocks the growth of or destroys small bacteria) are provided for treatment and must be taken as prescribed, even if your symptoms go away.

Treatment may reduce the risk of getting other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). BV can return even after treatment. Male sex partners of women with BV do not need treatment. However, BV can spread between female sex partners.

## PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS

Health care providers and scientists do not completely understand how BV spreads or know how best to prevent it. The following basic prevention steps may help lower your risk of getting BV:

- Limiting your number of sex partners.
- Not douching.
- Using condoms the right way every time you have sex.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/bacterial-vaginosis/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/bacterial-vaginosis/about/)



# Chlamydia

(KLUH-MI-DEE-UH)



Chlamydia is a common bacterial STI that can cause infection. Anyone who is sexually active can get chlamydia. Chlamydia is easily treated; if untreated, it can lead to serious health problems. Chlamydia can be transmitted through vaginal, oral, or anal sex. A pregnant person with Chlamydia can pass the infection on to the baby.

## SYMPTOMS

Most people have no symptoms and can pass it on to others without knowing it. Symptoms may include:

- An unusual discharge from the vagina or penis.
- Burning sensation when peeing.
- Burning sensation or itching around the opening of the penis.
- Pain and swelling in one or both testicles (although this is less common).
- Discomfort or bleeding from the vagina during sex. Women may also have lower abdominal pain during sex.
- Nausea or fever.

Men and women can also get chlamydia in their rectum. This happens either by having receptive anal sex, or by spread from another infected site (such as the vagina). While these infections often cause no symptoms, they can cause:

- Rectal pain
- Discharge
- Bleeding

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

There is no vaccine. Chlamydia can be treated and cured with antibiotics.

## **PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS**

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. Condoms used the correct way can reduce the risk of transmission (the process of passing something from one person or place to another). Have a sexual health conversation with potential partners. The best way to prevent chlamydia is to have sex with someone who is not infected and who only has sex with you.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/chlamydia/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/chlamydia/about/)



# Genital Herpes

(JEH·NUH·TUHL HUR·PEEZ)



Herpes is caused by two types of viruses - herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) and herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2). HSV-1 is the most common herpes simplex virus. Most people with oral herpes get it during childhood or young adulthood from non-sexual contact with saliva or sharing personal items such as lip balms and razors.

HSV-2 is less common and is most often the cause of genital herpes. You can get genital herpes by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the infection. You can get herpes if you have contact with:

- A herpes sore.
- Saliva from a partner with an oral herpes infection.
- Genital fluids from a partner with a genital herpes infection.
- Skin in the oral area of a partner with oral herpes.
- Skin in the genital area of a partner with genital herpes.



**The virus can be spread through contact with infected body fluids even when sores are not present.**

## **SYMPTOMS**

Herpes sores usually appear as one or more blisters on or around the genitals, rectum or mouth. The blisters break and leave painful sores that may take a week or more to heal. Flu-like symptoms (fever, body aches, or swollen glands) also may occur during the first outbreak.

HSV-1 often causes oral herpes, which can result in cold sores or fever blisters on or around the mouth. However, most people with oral herpes do not have any symptoms. HSV-2 can result in sores around your vagina, penis or anus. Sometimes these sores can be seen on your buttocks and thighs.

Herpes infection can cause sores or breaks in the skin or lining of the mouth, vagina, and rectum, which provides a way for HIV to enter the body.

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

There is no vaccine or cure for genital herpes. However, there are medicines that can prevent or shorten outbreaks. A daily anti-herpes medicine can make it less likely to pass the infection on to your sex partner(s).

## PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. If you are sexually active, you can do the following things to lower your chances of getting genital herpes:

- Being in a long-term, mutually monogamous (only one mate, spouse, or sexual partner at one time) relationship.
- Using condoms the right way every time you have sex.
- Be aware that not all herpes sores occur in areas that a condom can cover. Also, the skin can release the virus (shed) from areas that do not have a visible herpes sore. For these reasons, condoms may not fully protect you from getting herpes.
- If your sex partner(s) has/have genital herpes, you can lower your risk of getting it if:
  - Your partner takes anti-herpes medicine every day. This is something your partner should discuss with his or her health care provider.
  - You avoid having vaginal, anal, or oral sex when your partner has herpes symptoms (i.e., during an “outbreak”).



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/herpes/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/herpes/about/)



# Gonorrhea

(GAA·NR·EE·UH)



Gonorrhea is a common bacterial STI that can cause infection among people who are sexually active. Gonorrhea is spread through vaginal, oral, or anal sex or from contact with bodily fluids from an infected person. You can get gonorrhea in the anus, eyes, mouth, urinary tract, or uterus. Left untreated, Gonorrhea may cause serious health problems and may prevent you from having children. Untreated gonorrhea can also increase your chances of getting or giving HIV.

## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may include:

- Vaginal bleeding between periods.
- Increased vaginal discharge.
- Pain or burning sensation when peeing.
- A white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis.
- Painful or swollen testicles.

- A sore throat.
- Anal itching, soreness, bleeding or discharge from your rectum, or painful bowel movements.

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

There is no vaccine. Gonorrhea can be treated and cured with antibiotics.

## **PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS**

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. If you are sexually active, the following things can lower your chances of getting gonorrhea:

- Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and does not have gonorrhea.
- Using condoms the right way every time you have sex.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/gonorrhea/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/gonorrhea/about/)



# Hepatitis

(HEH·PUH·TAI·TUHS)



**Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver that can be caused by some viruses, heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis (caused by a virus) are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.**

**Hepatitis A** virus is spread when someone ingests the virus (even in microscopic amounts too small to see) through ingesting contaminated (having been made dirty by exposure to an outside substance) food or water or through close, intimate contact with an infected person. People should only be tested for hepatitis A if they have symptoms and think they might have been infected.

**Hepatitis B** virus is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from an infected person enter the body of someone who is not infected. It can also be spread by sharing personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, needles, syringes, and some medical equipment such as glucose monitors. The virus is also transmitted through sexual intercourse. Anyone with ongoing risk for hepatitis B exposure should be tested periodically.

**Hepatitis C** virus is spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected, including sexual contact with an infected person or sharing equipment that has been contaminated with blood from an infected person. People should be tested for hepatitis C at least once in their lifetime, and routine testing is recommended for people with ongoing risk factors.

## **SYMPTOMS**

Many people with hepatitis do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. If symptoms occur with an acute infection, they can appear anytime from 2 weeks to 6 months after exposure. Symptoms of acute hepatitis can include:

- Fever.
- Loss of appetite.
- Dark urine.
- Joint pain.
- Fatigue.
- Nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain.
- Light-colored stools.
- Jaundice.

Symptoms of chronic viral hepatitis can take decades to develop. Untreated hepatitis B or C can lead to cirrhosis over time and increase the risk of developing liver cancer.

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

Vaccines are available to protect against hepatitis A and B. People who test positive for hepatitis A and acute hepatitis B are usually treated through supportive care (rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids) to help relieve symptoms. People with chronic hepatitis B can be treated with antiviral drugs and should be monitored regularly for response to therapy and signs of liver disease progression.

No vaccine is available for Hepatitis C. It is curable in more than 95% of cases. Treatment typically includes taking pills for 8 – 12 weeks. Side effects of the medication are minimal.

## **PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS**

Since viral hepatitis can be spread through other ways, below are additional ways to reduce your risk of getting viral hepatitis:

- Do not share needles, syringes, or other injection equipment.
- Thoroughly wash hands after using the bathroom, changing diapers, after sexual activity and before preparing food.
- To reduce the risk of transmission, condoms should be used for oral sex, and barriers such as dental dams should be used between the mouth and vagina or anus. Condoms should be used for sexual intercourse.

- Do not wash or reuse condoms or dental dams; use a new one for each sexual contact.
- If you inject drugs, avoid contact with blood by practicing proper hygiene and using clean surfaces. Use sterile syringes and mark yours to identify it from others. Clean cookers before use; it is best to not share cookers. Use an alcohol pad to clean the injection area and tissue or cotton, while applying pressure, to stop the bleeding after injecting.
- The best protection against hepatitis A & B is vaccination.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/about/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/about/index.html)





# HIV/AIDS



HIV (human immunodeficiency virus, **Hyoo**-muhn l-myoo-no-di-fi-shuhn-see Vai-ruhs) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, Uh-**kwai**-urd l-myoo-no-di-fi-shuhn-see **Sin**-drowm). There is currently no cure; people with HIV who get effective HIV treatment can live long, healthy lives and protect their partners.

If you have an undetectable viral load, you will not transmit HIV through sex. This is also known as Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).

## **SYMPTOMS**

Most people have flu-like symptoms within 2 to 4 weeks after infection. Symptoms may last for a few days or several weeks. Having these symptoms alone does not mean you have HIV as other illnesses can cause similar symptoms. Some people have no symptoms at all.

The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested. When people with HIV don't get treatment, they typically progress through three stages:

### **Stage 1: Acute HIV infection**

- People have a large amount of HIV in their blood and are very contagious.
- Many people have flu-like symptoms.

### **Stage 2: Chronic HIV infection (*also called asymptomatic HIV infection or clinical latency*)**

- HIV is still active and continues to reproduce in the body.
- People may not have any symptoms or get sick during this phase but can transmit HIV.
- People who take HIV treatment as prescribed may never move into Stage 3 (AIDS).
- Without HIV treatment, this stage may last a decade or longer, or may progress faster. At the end of this stage, the amount of HIV in the blood (viral load) goes up and the person may move into Stage 3 (AIDS).

### **Stage 3: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)**

This is the most severe stage of HIV infection. People with AIDS have badly damaged immune systems, have a high viral load and may easily transmit HIV to others. They can get an increasing number of opportunistic infections or other serious illnesses. Without HIV treatment, people with AIDS typically survive about three years.

### **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

No vaccine is currently available to prevent HIV. HIV treatment (antiretroviral therapy or ART) involves taking medicine as prescribed by a health care provider. HIV treatment reduces the amount of HIV in your body and helps you stay healthy, with the goal of having an undetectable viral load.

- There is no cure for HIV, but you can control it with HIV treatment.
- Most people can get the virus under control within six months.
- HIV treatment does not prevent transmission of other sexually transmitted diseases.

## PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. Today, more tools than ever are available to prevent HIV. You can use strategies such as abstinence (not having sex), never sharing needles, and using condoms the right way every time you have sex. You may also be able to take advantage of HIV prevention medicines such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/hiv/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/about/)



# HPV (HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS)

(HYOO-MUHN PA-PUH-LOW-MUH VAI-RUHS)



HPV is the most common STI. There are many different types of HPV. Some types can cause health problems, including genital warts and cancers. A health care provider can usually diagnose warts by looking at the genital area. There are vaccines that can stop these health problems from happening.

## SYMPTOMS

In nine out of 10 cases, HPV goes away on its own within two years without health problems. But when HPV does not go away, it can cause health problems like genital warts and cancer. Genital warts usually appear as a small bump or group of bumps in the genital area. They can be small or large, raised or flat, or shaped like cauliflower.

HPV can cause cervical and other cancers, including cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, or anus. It can also cause cancer in the back of the throat (called oropharyngeal cancer). This can include the base of the tongue and tonsils. Cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV.

Genital warts and cancers result from different types of HPV. There is no way to know who will develop cancer or other health problems from HPV. People with weak immune systems (including those with HIV) may be less able to fight off HPV. They may also be more likely to develop health problems from HPV.

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

The HPV vaccine is safe and effective. It can protect against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV when given in the recommended age groups. Speak to a health care provider about the vaccine. CDC recommends HPV vaccination for:

- All preteens (including boys and girls) ages 11 or 12 (or can start at age 9).
- Everyone through age 26, if not vaccinated already.

There is no treatment for the virus itself. However, there are treatments for the health problems that HPV can cause:

- Genital warts can go away with treatment from your health care provider or with prescription medicine. If left untreated, genital warts may go away, stay the same, or grow in size or number.
- Cervical precancer treatment is available. Women who get routine Pap tests and follow up as needed can find problems before cancer develops. Prevention is always better than treatment.
- Other HPV-related cancers are also more treatable when found and treated early.

## PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. You can do several things to lower your chances of getting HPV:

- Get vaccinated. The HPV vaccine is safe and effective. It can protect against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV when given in the recommended age groups.
- Get screened for cervical cancer. Routine screening for women ages 21 to 65 can prevent cervical cancer.

If you are sexually active:

- Use condoms the right way every time you have sex. This can lower your chances of getting HPV. But HPV can infect areas the condom does not cover. So, condoms may not fully protect against getting HPV; and
- Have sex only with someone who only has sex with you.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/sti/about/about-genital-hpv-infection.html](http://www.cdc.gov/sti/about/about-genital-hpv-infection.html)



# Mpox (FORMERLY MONKEYPOX) (EM-PAAKS)



**Mpox is a rash illness, caused by the mpox virus, which can be spread from person-to-person or animal-to-person, or from contact with contaminated materials. The mpox virus may be transmitted person-to-person (saliva, lesion fluid, and respiratory droplets), animal to-person, or from contact with materials contaminated with the virus. The virus enters the body through broken skin, or mucus membranes such as the eyes, nose, or mouth. The incubation period is usually 3-17 days.**

## **SYMPTOMS**

The disease typically begins with early symptoms of fever, headache, muscle aches, and exhaustion followed a few days later by a rash. For some people, the early symptoms were not noted before rash appearance. Lesions may be all over the body, including the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and head, or located only on the genitals or around the buttocks. The rash goes through four stages – flat (macular), to raised (papular), to fluid-filled (vesicular), to pus filled (pustular) –



before scabbing over and resolving. This happens over a period of 2-4 weeks. Lymph nodes may swell in the neck, armpits, or groin, or on one or both sides of the body.

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

The JYNNEOS vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine for reducing the risk of transmission of the mpox virus and reduces disease severity if you get mpox. There is no specific treatment for mpox, although antivirals developed for the treatment of smallpox may prove beneficial. Tecovirimat (also known as TPOXX, ST-246) is one such antiviral medication approved for the treatment of smallpox. This treatment option is available through an ongoing clinical trial (STOMP).

## **PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS**

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. The JYNNEOS vaccine is a safe vaccine for reducing the risk of transmission. To prevent infection, individuals should:

- Ensure infected individuals isolate from others until skin lesions have completely healed.
- Wear personal protective equipment when caring for infected people.

- Practice proper hand hygiene after contact with infected people or animals, washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or for as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice.
- Where soap and water are not available hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol should be used to cover all surfaces of the hands, then hands rubbed together until they feel dry.
- Avoid sex or skin-to-skin contact with someone who has a rash or other mpox-related symptoms.
- Talk to your sexual partner(s) about any recent illness and be aware of new or unexplained sores or rashes on your body or partner’s body, including genitals and anus.
- Avoid contact with materials that may be contaminated with the virus.
- Seek evaluation from your healthcare provider if you have been exposed to mpox. For some people who have been exposed to mpox, physicians and public health officials may recommend vaccination to prevent illness or decrease illness severity.



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[www.ncdhhs.gov/mpox](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/mpox)

[www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/mpox/prevention.html](http://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/mpox/prevention.html)



# Mycoplasma genitalium

(MGEN)

(MI-KOW-PLAZ-MUH JEH-NUH-TA-LEE-UHM)



**Mycoplasma genitalium (or Mgen) is a type of bacteria that can infect the cervix (opening to the uterus), the inside of the penis (the urethra), or the rectum.**

**You can get Mgen by having vaginal or anal sex without a condom with someone who has the infection. Researchers are still determining whether sex partners can spread Mgen through oral sex. A person with Mgen can pass the infection to someone even when they have no signs or symptoms.**

## **SYMPTOMS**

People with Mgen often have no symptoms. However, someone with symptoms may notice:

- Vaginal discharge.
- A burning sensation when peeing.
- Discharge from the penis.

## VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION

Laboratory tests can diagnose Mgen. Your health care provider may ask you to provide a urine sample for testing. In some cases, they may use (or ask you to use) a swab to get a sample from the vagina or cervix.

The right treatment with antibiotics can cure Mgen. When taken properly, treatment will stop the infection and can decrease your chances of having problems later. Although medicine will stop the infection, it will not undo any permanent damage caused by the disease.

## PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. If you are sexually active, the following things can help lower your chances of getting Mgen:

- Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who does not have Mgen; and
- Using condoms the right way every time you have vaginal or anal sex.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/mgen/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/mgen/about/)



# Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

(PEL-VUHK UHN-FLA-MUH-TAW-REE DI-ZEEZ)



**Pelvic inflammatory disease is an infection of a woman's reproductive organs. It is a complication often caused by some STIs, like chlamydia and gonorrhea. Other infections that are not sexually transmitted can also cause PID. There are no tests for PID. A diagnosis is usually based on a combination of your medical history, physical exam, and other test results.**

## **SYMPTOMS**

You may not realize you have PID because your symptoms may be mild, or you may not experience any symptoms. However, if you do have symptoms, you may notice:

- Pain in your lower abdomen.
- Fever.
- An unusual discharge with a bad odor from your vagina.
- Pain and/or bleeding when you have sex.

- Burning sensation when you urinate.
- Bleeding between periods.

If diagnosed and treated early, the complications of PID can be prevented. Some of the complications of PID are:

- Formation of scar tissue both outside and inside the fallopian tubes that can lead to tubal blockage.
- Ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the womb).
- Infertility (inability to get pregnant).
- Long-term pelvic/abdominal pain.

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

If PID is diagnosed early, it can be treated. However, treatment won't undo any damage that has already happened to your reproductive system. The longer you wait to get treated, the more likely it is that you will have complications from PID. While taking antibiotics, your symptoms may go away before the infection is cured. Even if the symptoms go away, you should finish taking all of your medicine. Be sure to tell your recent sex partner(s), so they can get tested and treated for STIs, too.

It is also very important that you and your partner both finish your treatment before having any kind of sex so that you don't re-infect each other. You can get PID again if you get infected with an STI again. Also, if you have had PID before, you have a higher chance of getting it again.

## **PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS**

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. If you are sexually active, you can do the following things to lower your chances of getting PID:

- Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and has negative STI test results.
- Using condoms the right way every time you have sex.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/pid/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/pid/about/)



# Syphilis

(SI·FUH·LUHS)



Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that can cause serious health problems without treatment. Infection develops in stages. Each stage can have different signs and symptoms. Syphilis is transmitted by direct contact with a syphilis sore during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. If you are pregnant and have syphilis, you can pass it to your unborn baby.

## SYMPTOMS

There are four stages of syphilis (primary, secondary, latent, and tertiary). Each stage has different signs and symptoms with different disease severity.

**Primary Stage:** During the first (primary) stage of syphilis, you may have one or more painless sores on the genitals or in the mouth, anus, or rectum – it is likely to be wherever you had sex. The name for this type of sore is a chancre (SHANKer). If you had oral sex, it might be in your mouth or on your genitals. Many chancres are painless, so you



might not notice you have a sore unless you look for it. The sore lasts 3 to 6 weeks, and will heal on its own even if not treated. Without treatment, the disease will progress to the next stage.

**Secondary Stage:** During the secondary stage, you may have skin rashes and/or sores in your mouth, vagina, or anus. This stage usually starts with a rash on one or more areas of your body. The rash can show up when your primary sore is healing or several weeks after the sore has healed. The rash can be on the palms of your hands and/or the bottoms of your feet. Syphilis rashes are often red or brown and usually don't itch. Other symptoms may include fever, sore throat, muscle aches, headaches, hair loss, and feeling tired. Even without treatment, symptoms of secondary syphilis will go away on their own, but the infection will progress to the next stage.

**Latent Stage:** The latent stage of syphilis is a period when there are no visible signs or symptoms. Without treatment, you can continue to have syphilis in your body for years.

**Tertiary Stage:** Tertiary syphilis is very serious. Most people with untreated syphilis do not develop tertiary syphilis. However, when it does happen, it usually occurs 10-30 years after infection begins. Tertiary syphilis is very serious, damaging your internal organs and can result in death.

Without treatment, syphilis can spread to the brain and nervous system (neurosyphilis), the eye (ocular syphilis), or the ear (otosyphilis). This can happen during any stage described above.

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

There is no vaccine. Syphilis can be treated and cured with antibiotics.

## **PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS**

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. Using condoms the correct way can reduce the risk of transmission by preventing contact with a sore. Sometimes sores occur in areas not covered by a condom. Contact with these sores can transmit syphilis. Have a sexual health conversation with potential partners. The best way to prevent syphilis is to have sex with someone who is not infected and who only has sex with you.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/syphilis/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/syphilis/about/)



# Trichomoniasis

(TRI-KUH-MUH-NAI-UH-SUHS)



Trichomoniasis (or “trich”) is a very common STI caused by infection with *Trichomonas vaginalis* (a protozoan parasite). Sexually active people can get trich by having sex without a condom with a partner who has trich.

In women, the infection is most commonly found in the lower genital tract (vulva, vagina, cervix, or urethra). In men, the infection is most commonly found inside the penis (urethra). During sex, the parasite usually spreads from a penis to a vagina, or from a vagina to a penis. It can also spread from one vagina to another vagina.

## **SYMPTOMS**

Many people will have no symptoms. Some people get symptoms within 5 to 28 days after getting the infection. Others do not develop symptoms until much later. Symptoms can come and go. When trich does cause symptoms, they may include:

- Mild irritation to severe inflammation.
- Men with trich may notice itching or irritation inside the penis; burning after peeing or ejaculating; and discharge from the penis.
- Women with trich may notice itching, burning, redness or soreness of the genitals; discomfort when peeing; and a clear, white, yellowish, or greenish vaginal discharge (i.e., thin discharge or increased volume) with a fishy smell.

Having trich can make sex feel unpleasant. Without treatment, the infection can last for months or even years.

## **VACCINE/TREATMENT INFORMATION**

There is no vaccine. Trich is a common STI and is curable. A health care provider can treat the infection with medication (pills) taken by mouth. This treatment is also safe for pregnant people.

## PREVENTION/RISK REDUCTION METHODS

The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. If you are sexually active, you can do the following things to lower your chances of getting trich:

- Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and does not have trich.
- Using condoms the right way every time you have sex.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[www.cdc.gov/trichomoniasis/about/](http://www.cdc.gov/trichomoniasis/about/)





# Sexual Health Resources

Any sexual interaction (oral, vaginal, anal) has some sort of risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection. The only 100% sure way to prevent sexually transmitted infections is to not have sex or any sexual contact. However, if you are sexually active, there are a variety of ways to reduce your risk of getting an STI. These are recapped below:

- Being in a mutually monogamous relationship (only having sex with one person)
- Using condoms correctly for every sexual encounter (vaginal, anal, and even oral)
- Having open communication with your partner(s) about their sexual practices and risk reduction
- Examining your partner's body before sex for sores, warts, discharge, or anything else that may seem off
- Getting tested regularly to ensure STIs do not progress and affect other body systems
- Getting on HIV PrEP to prevent HIV
- Getting DoxyPEP after a risky sexual encounter to reduce the risk of getting a bacterial infection like chlamydia, gonorrhea, or syphilis
- Getting vaccinated to prevent certain viral STIs like hepatitis A and B, HPV, and mpox



**HIV/STI TESTING LOCATOR:**

<https://gettested.cdc.gov/>



**MPOX VACCINE LOCATOR:**

<https://mpoxvaccine.cdc.gov/>



**PREP LOCATOR:**

<https://prepolator.org/>



**FIND YOUR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT:**

<https://ncdhhs.gov/lhd>



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