

## WHAT ARE SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs) ?

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are spread from one person to another during sex.

The common STDs include:

### CHLAMYDIA

Chlamydia is a common infection among young, sexually active people. **Most people do not have any symptoms.** When there are symptoms, men may have a discharge from the penis; women may have a discharge from the vagina, irregular bleeding or abdominal pain.

Chlamydia is cured by antibiotics. If untreated, it can cause infertility in both women and men. Untreated chlamydia is the most common infection to spread to the reproductive organs in women, where it can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

### GONORRHOEA

**In men**, this infection may cause burning when passing urine and a yellow discharge from the penis. Some men may have the disease without symptoms.

**In women** there is often no sign of infection, but some women may have a yellow vaginal discharge, low abdominal pain or irregular menstrual bleeding.

**In both sexes** infection of the rectum may occur during anal sex and infection of the throat may occur during oral sex. Gonorrhoea usually causes no symptoms in either of these sites.

Gonorrhoea is easily cured by antibiotics. If untreated, it can cause infertility in women and (less commonly) in men. The infection can spread to the reproductive organs in women and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

### SYPHILIS

Initially, this infection may produce a painless sore which disappears in 2-3 weeks. Two to four months later there may be other symptoms including a skin rash, loss of hair or moist lumps around the genitals or anus. If not treated, these symptoms may disappear and recur over the next two years. Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics. If untreated, a person may be infectious to sex partners for up to two years. Some people develop conditions involving the brain, heart or spinal cord.

## NON SPECIFIC URETHRITIS (NSU)

NSU occurs in men and may produce discharge from the penis or burning when passing urine. It is inflammation of the urethra which is not caused by gonorrhoea or chlamydia. Antibiotic treatment cures the infection.

Although it does not cause symptoms in women, female partners of men with NSU may need to be examined if re-infection occurs. Male partners of men with NSU should also be examined.

### TRICHOMONIASIS

In women, this infection can cause an unpleasant discharge and irritation of the vagina. Antibiotics cure the infection. Men usually do not get symptoms but may also need to be treated to prevent re-infection.

### HERPES

Herpes simplex viruses can cause "cold sores" in the mouth or genital ulcers in the sexual organs - the same viruses can cause both infections. Oral sex can spread the infection from a cold sore on the mouth to the genital skin of a partner and vice versa. Symptoms include blisters which then become ulcers. These usually heal in 10 to 14 days. However, many people infected with the herpes virus do not have symptoms and are unaware they are infected. The first outbreak of genital herpes is usually the worst, following outbreaks are usually less severe. Outbreaks are usually at or near the site of the original sore. Some people never have a recurrence, but when people have severe, repeated outbreaks medication is available to help control their symptoms. Once a person has genital herpes, the virus stays in nerve cells in the body and may be passed on by direct skin contact during sex (oral, anal or genital). Transmission can sometimes occur even when the infected person does not appear to have an active outbreak of herpes sores.

### WARTS

Genital warts are very common. There are many strains of wart virus but only a few affect the genitals. Genital warts are spread by sexual contact. Some people have obvious warts, but others carry the virus and pass it on without having any sign of warts. Genital warts may appear weeks, months or even years after infection has occurred. Treatment involves removing the warts.

If particular strains of wart virus are present on a woman's cervix she may be at increased risk of developing cancer. Regular Pap smears and early treatment, if necessary, will help prevent cancer of the cervix.

## MOLLUSCUM CONTAGIOSUM

Molluscum is a skin infection and appears as round, pearly lumps with a central white core. It can be spread by sexual and non sexual contact. This harmless condition is easily treated.

## HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

This virus is spread by blood to blood contact (eg. sharing needles) or by sex (vaginal, oral or anal). Once infected, a person remains infected, and infectious, for life. HIV is diagnosed by a blood test.

HIV affects the immune system, and people infected with HIV may have no symptoms for many years. Ultimately, the immune system becomes ineffective and serious infections and/or cancers develop, this is known as AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

## HEPATITIS B

Hepatitis B is a virus which affects the liver. The virus is spread by contact with blood (eg. sharing needles) or during sex (vaginal, oral or anal). People who are infected may have no symptoms or they may become ill with fever, nausea, dark urine or jaundice (yellow skin, eyes). Most adults recover from hepatitis B infection, develop antibodies to the virus and are no longer infectious to others. A few people retain the virus, become carriers, can infect other people, and have an increased risk of developing liver disease. A vaccine for hepatitis B is available, it is not effective for hepatitis B carriers.

## HEPATITIS C

Hepatitis C is another virus which affects the liver. It is spread by blood to blood contact and is **not** easily spread by sexual contact. After being infected a few people clear the virus, but most become carriers. There is no test to check if the virus has completely cleared from a person. The blood of all carriers is infectious. Some carriers are healthy but others have liver problems.

Many Australians with hepatitis C were infected by sharing drug using equipment, tattoos or blood transfusions (since 1990, blood has been screened for hepatitis C). There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

### CRABS

Crabs are lice that attach to coarse body hair and cause irritation. They are usually spread by close body contact, and rarely by contact with bed linen, towels etc. A lotion is applied to infested parts of the body. One or two applications will usually kill the lice and eggs.

### SCABIES

Scabies are mites which burrow into the skin and cause intense itching in the infested person. Transmission occurs by prolonged close body contact; the mites are easily passed among children. A lotion is applied externally to the body, from the neck down. One or two applications of the lotion will usually kill the mites and eggs.

### BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS

Bacterial vaginosis is caused by excessive growth of bacteria which are normally present in the vagina. The reason for the change in bacteria growth is uncertain. Some women develop bacterial vaginosis soon after intercourse with a new partner. Symptoms may include irritation and vaginal discharge with an unpleasant odour. Women who have symptoms are given medication. No counterpart to bacterial vaginosis occurs in men, and treatment of male partners is not required.

### THRUSH (CANDIDIASIS)

Candida is a yeast that lives naturally in the mouth, vagina and intestines. If excessive growth occurs, it may produce an itchy vaginal discharge which requires anti-fungal treatment. In some women sex may irritate the vagina and allow candida to grow. Thrush is not an STD and sexual partners do not require treatment.

### BALANITIS

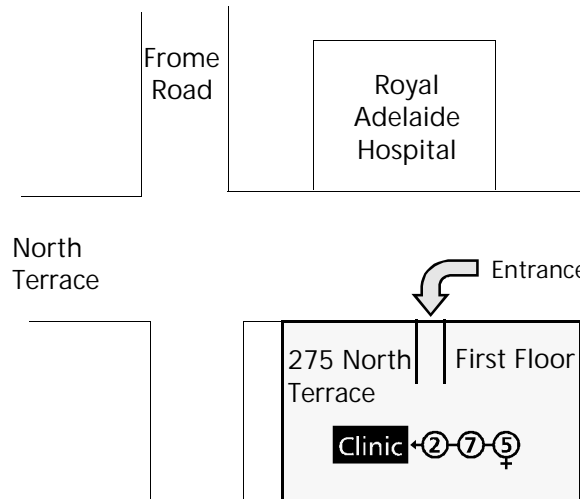
Balanitis is inflammation (redness and soreness) of the head of the penis. It is not an STD but sex may irritate the head of the penis and lead to balanitis. Men with foreskins are more likely to get this condition. The most effective treatment is to keep the head of the penis and the foreskin clean and dry. Antifungal or steroid creams are not usually recommended. Sexual partners do not require treatment.

### Recommended Reading

*Sexually Transmitted Diseases*

by Plummer, Kovacs and Westmore Hill of Content Publishing, \$15.95 at time of printing

1st floor 275 North Terrace  
Adelaide 5000  
Telephone: (08) 8226 6025  
Toll free country call  
1800 806 490  
email: stdservices@health.sa.gov.au



# Sexually Transmitted Diseases

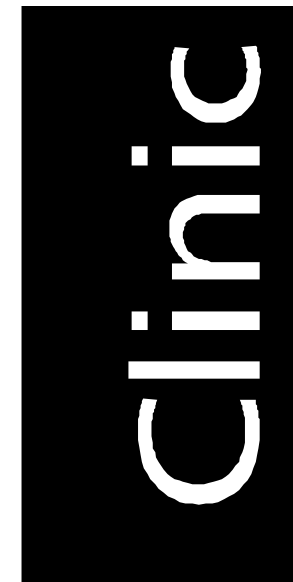
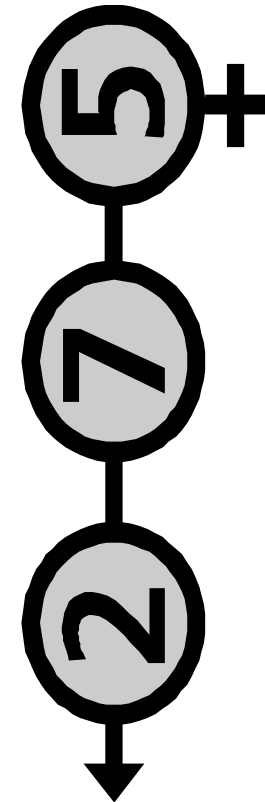
**Sexually Transmitted Diseases Service**  
Royal Adelaide Hospital

Free and confidential advice, testing and treatment for all STDs including HIV/AIDS

No appointment necessary

Monday, Thursday, Friday  
10.00 am - 4.30 pm

Tuesday, Wednesday  
11.00am - 6.30pm



1st floor 275 North Terrace  
Adelaide 5000

Telephone: (08) 8222 5075  
Toll free country call:  
1800 806 490

Web Site:  
[www.stdservices.on.net](http://www.stdservices.on.net)