

# Screening and Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Most people who have an infection usually will experience at least one or two noticeable symptoms. However, many people who have a sexually transmitted infection caused by **chlamydia** might not have symptoms and might not know they are infected. This is why it is important to get tested or “screened” if you are at risk for coming in contact with someone who is infected.

**Chlamydia** is a sexually transmitted disease caused by infection with a type of bacteria called *Chlamydia trachomatis*. An article in the January 3, 2001, issue of *JAMA* discusses the association between infection with certain strains or **serotypes** of *Chlamydia trachomatis* and a higher likelihood of contracting **cervical squamous cell carcinoma** (cancer of the **cervix**—part of a woman’s reproductive tract).

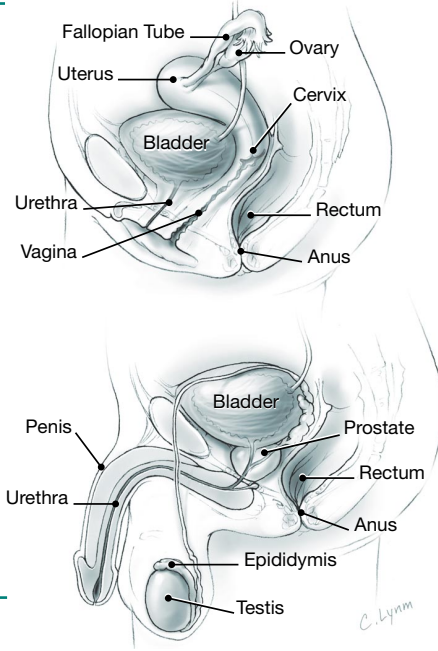
## WHAT ARE SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES?

Sexually transmitted diseases (sometimes referred to as “STDs”) are diseases that are usually spread through sexual activity. They include chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital herpes, HIV/AIDS, and syphilis. There are many serious health problems associated with STDs. These include **pelvic inflammatory disease** in women (a serious infection of the uterus and fallopian tubes) and **epididymitis** (inflammation of the epididymis—a coiled tube by the testis) in men. These complications from STDs can cause infertility and increase the risk for some cancers.

STDs can be spread by other means than sexual activity, such as contact with body fluids from an infected person, and can be passed from a mother to her newborn baby.

## SYMPTOMS OF AN STD INFECTION

- Burning sensation in the **urethra** (the tube connected to the bladder through which urine is eliminated from the body) when urinating
- Sores, bumps, rashes, or blisters in the genital or anal area
- Abnormal discharge from the vagina or penis
- Itching, pain, or discharge in the anal area
- Redness or swelling in the genital area
- Pain in the pelvic or abdominal area
- Pain, soreness, irritation, or other discomfort during intercourse, or bleeding after intercourse
- Recurring yeast infections



Remember that many people with STDs may not experience symptoms.

Sources: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The AMA Complete Guide to Women’s Health, The AMA Family Medical Guide.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF SCREENING

Anyone who is sexually active should have regular checkups for STDs. If it is determined that you are infected, you can receive medication to treat the infection and prevent spreading the disease to others by sexual contact or to your baby, if you are pregnant.

## LOWERING YOUR RISK OF STD INFECTION

If you are sexually active and are unsure if your partner is infected with an STD (or is in contact with someone else who is infected), or if you have more than one sex partner, you should:

- Practice safe sex; correctly use a new latex condom from the beginning throughout the duration of the sex act every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex
- Avoid contact with body fluids and tissues, such as vaginal fluids, semen, and any open sores
- Have regular checkups for STDs

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- CDC National STD Hotline 800/227-8922 or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [www.niaid.nih.gov](http://www.niaid.nih.gov)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA’s Web site ([www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm)). Previous *JAMA* Patient Pages were published on the following STDs: syphilis on July 26, 2000, genital herpes on September 9, 1998, and chlamydia on August 12, 1998.

