



The sexually transmitted diseases or STDs, were previously known as sexually transmitted infections or STIs and venereal diseases or VD. STDs are serious health problems and if untreated, could cause permanent damage including death. Unfortunately, males and females both suffer from a number of STDs viz.

- **AIDS (HIV)**
- **Chancroid**
- **Chlamydia**
- **Crabs**
- **Gonorrhea**
- **Hepatitis**
- **Herpes**
- **Human Papillomavirus/Genital Warts**
- **Lymphogranuloma Venereum (LGV)**
- **Molluscum Contagiosum**
- **Nongonococcal Urethritis (NGU)**
- **Pelvic Inflammatory disease (PID)**
- **Scabies**
- **Syphilis**
- **Vaginitis**

It is difficult to give details of each and every disease here, however, we try to understand each of the above by way of the definitions in brief :

AIDS (HIV) (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). This virus damages the cells of the body's immune system and then slowly destroys the body's ability to fight infections including some cancers.

Chancroid : it is a treatable bacterial infection that causes painful sores. Chancroid is a highly contagious yet curable sexually transmitted disease (STD). Chancroid is caused by the bacteria known as Haemophilus Ducreyi [hum-AH-fill-us DOO-cray]. Chancroid causes ulcers, usually of the genitals.



Chlamydia : Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD). It is caused by the bacterium, Chlamydia trachomatis. Even though symptoms of chlamydia are usually mild or absent, serious complications that cause irreversible damage, including infertility and damage to a woman's reproductive organs can occur "silently" before a woman ever recognizes a problem. Chlamydia also can cause discharge from the penis of an infected man.

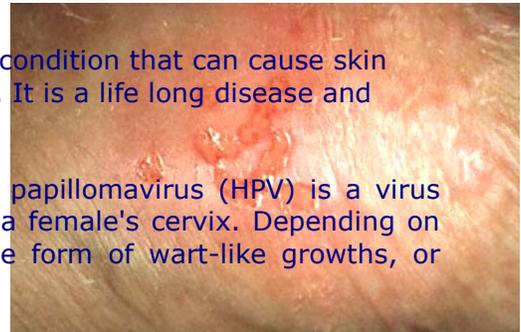


Crabs : Crabs are also known as pediculosis pubis, crabs are parasites or bugs that live on the pubic hair in the genital area.

Gonorrhea : It is also a treatable bacterial infection of the penis, vagina or anus. Gonorrhea causes pain, or burning feeling as well as a pus-like discharge.

Hepatitis : It affects the liver. There are more than four types. But Hepatitis A and B are the most common of all.

Genital Herpes : Genital herpes is a recurrent skin condition that can cause skin irritations in the genital region (anus, vagina, penis). It is a life long disease and could be passed to the generations as well.



Human Papillomavirus/Genital Warts : Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a virus that affects the skin in the genital area, as well as a female's cervix. Depending on the type of HPV involved, symptoms can be in the form of wart-like growths, or abnormal cell changes.

Lymphogranuloma Venereum (LGV) : LGV is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or infection involving the lymph glands in the genital area. It is caused by a specific strain of chlamydia.

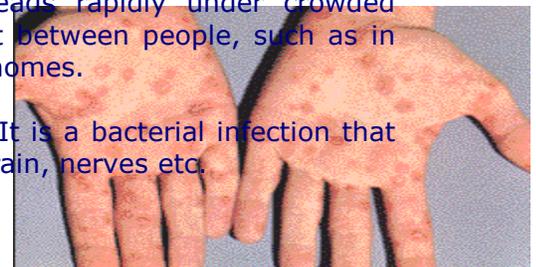
Molluscum Contagiosum : Molluscum Contagiosum is a skin disease that is caused by a virus, usually causing lesions or bumps.

Nongonococcal Urethritis (NGU) : Nongonococcal urethritis (or NGU) is a treatable bacterial infection of the urethra (the tube within the penis) and quite often, it is associated with chlamydia.

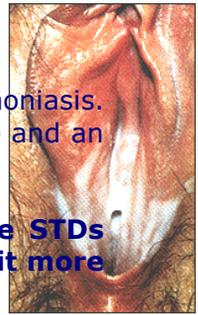
Pelvic Inflammatory disease (PID) : PID is an infection of the female reproductive organs by chlamydia, gonorrhea or other bacteria.

Scabies : Scabies is an infestation of the skin with the microscopic mite i.e. *Sarcoptes scabiei*. Infestation is very common and is found worldwide. It affects people of all races and social classes. Scabies spreads rapidly under crowded conditions where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact between people, such as in hospitals, institutions, child-care facilities, and nursing homes.

Syphilis : Like some other STDs, it is also treatable. It is a bacterial infection that can spread throughout the body and affect the heart, brain, nerves etc.



Vaginitis : Vaginitis is caused by different germs including yeast and trichomoniasis. It is an infection of the vagina resulting in itching, burning, vaginal discharge and an odd odour.



These days, AIDS has acquired un-proportional publicity among the STDs and is the most dreaded one after Genital Herpes. We try to know a bit more about these two deadly diseases.

As defined above, AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). This virus damages the cells of the body's immune system and then slowly destroys the body's ability to fight infections including some cancers.

How HIV is transmitted ? HIV is spread most commonly by having

- a) unprotected sex with an infected partner
- b) Sharing drug needles or syringes among the infected
- c) through contact with infected blood e.g. through transfusions
- d) from HIV infected pregnant Mother to child
- e) from infected mothers to babies through the breast milk.

Most vulnerable to HIV AIDS are those who have a sexually transmitted infection (STI) such as syphilis, genital herpes, chlamydial infection, gonorrhoea, or bacterial vaginosis.

Symptoms of HIV infections : Unfortunately, initially there are not any specific symptoms when first become infected with HIV. However, after a month or two of the contact, there appears a a) flu-like illness which may include Fever, Headache, tiredness. And b) enlarged lymph nodes (glands of the immune system easily felt in the neck and groin).

All these symptoms usually disappear within a week to a month and are often mistaken for those of some other viral infection. During this period, people are very infectious and HIV is present in large quantities in genital fluids. More persistent or severe symptoms may not appear for 10 years or more after HIV first enters the body in adults, or within 2 years in children born with HIV infection. This period varies in each individual as some people may begin to have symptoms within a few months, while others may be symptom-free for more than 10 years.

Other symptoms often experienced months to years before the onset of AIDS include

- Weight loss,
- Lack of energy,
- Frequent fevers & sweats
- Persistent or frequent yeast infections (oral or vaginal)
- Vision loss,
- Nausea, abdominal cramps, and vomiting
- Persistent skin rashes or flaky skin
- Short-term memory loss,
- Coughing and shortness of breath,
- Seizures and lack of coordination,
- Difficult or painful swallowing,
- Pelvic inflammatory disease in women that does not respond to treatment.



Many patients develop frequent and severe herpes infections that cause mouth, genital, or anal sores and / or a painful nerve disease called shingles. Children may grow slowly or be sick a lot.

Diagnosis :

Because early HIV infection often causes no symptoms, the best way to its diagnosis is by testing the blood for the presence of antibodies (disease-fighting proteins) to HIV. HIV antibodies generally do not reach noticeable levels in the blood for 1 to 3 months following infection. It may take the antibodies as long as 6 months to be produced in quantities large enough to show up in standard blood tests. Two most common HIV infection blood tests are ELISA and Western Blot. If still the tests are negative, then additional tests would be required including a repeat of antibodies tests.

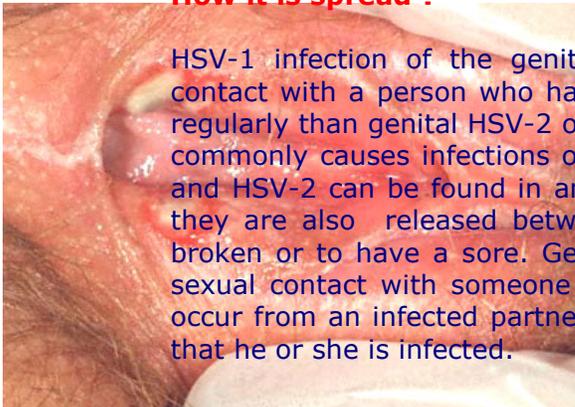
Treatment :

Since 1981 when the AIDS was first reported in the US, a lot has been done in this field of medicine though initially there were no medicines to combat the underlying immune deficiency. Many drugs have been developed to fight both HIV infection and its associated infections and cancers. Now many approved drugs are in the market which are available only through prescription. In case of any symptoms or any doubt of contracting of HIV, one must immediately contact the Doctors / GPs / Hospitals and start treatment.

What is Genital Herpes (GH) :

As simply defined above, it is a recurrent, life-long viral infection and is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the herpes simplex viruses type 1 (HSV-1) and type 2 (HSV-2). Most genital herpes is caused by HSV-2. Most individuals have no or only minimal symptoms of this infectious disease. The first signs when appear, are in the form of one or more blisters on or around the genitals or rectum. The blisters break and leave behind tender ulcers / sores. These ulcers may take two to four weeks to heal the first time they occur. Typically, another outbreak can appear weeks or months after the first one but generally it is less severe and shorter than the first outbreak. Although the infection can stay in the body indefinitely, the number of outbreaks tends to decrease over a period of years.

How it is spread ?



HSV-1 infection of the genitals can be caused by oral-genital or genital-genital contact with a person who has HSV-1 infection. Genital HSV-1 outbreaks recur less regularly than genital HSV-2 outbreaks. HSV-1 can cause genital herpes, but it more commonly causes infections of the mouth and lips, so-called "fever blisters." HSV-1 and HSV-2 can be found in and released from the sores that the viruses cause, but they are also released between outbreaks from skin that does not appear to be broken or to have a sore. Generally, a person can only get HSV-2 infection during sexual contact with someone who has a genital HSV-2 infection. Transmission can occur from an infected partner who does not have a visible sore and may not know that he or she is infected.

Symptoms : Most people diagnosed with a first episode of genital herpes can expect to have four or five symptomatic recurrences within a year. However, over a period of time these recurrences usually decrease in frequency. Generally most people infected with HSV-2 are not aware of their infection. But if signs and symptoms occur during the first outbreak, they can be quite visible. The first outbreak usually occurs within two weeks after the virus is transmitted. The symptoms may include :

- the skin becomes reddened and multiple small blisters filled with a clear, straw-coloured fluid appear.
- swelling and tenderness of the lymph nodes in the groin area.
- in women, vaginal discharge and painful urination.
- in men, a possibility of painful urination if the lesion is near the opening of the urethra.
- fever.

Complications :

The herpes infection can be severe in people with suppressed immune systems. It can cause recurrent painful genital sores in many adults. Regardless of severity of symptoms, genital herpes frequently causes psychological distress in people who know they are infected. The worst thing is that it can cause potentially fatal infections in babies. It is important that women avoid contracting herpes during pregnancy because a first episode during pregnancy causes a greater risk of transmission to the baby. If a woman has active genital herpes at delivery, a caesarean delivery is usually performed. Fortunately, infection of a baby from a woman with herpes infection is rare.

Treatment :

There is no cure for the herpes simplex virus; once infected, patients will remain a carrier for the rest of their lives. However, it is manageable. Over the years, a number of treatments offering effective relief from symptoms of genital herpes have been developed. In addition, by being more aware of the initial symptoms of recurrence (skin sensitivity and tingling), timely treatment with medication as prescribed by the Doctor may help.

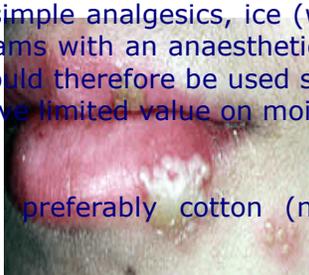
Simple treatments for the relief of discomfort :

The following non-specific treatments can alleviate the pain and discomfort of genital sores. (Consult your doctor, however, before attempting any usual remedies below)

a) Salt baths : used to wash the genital area, can clean, soothe and dry the sores. Use 1 teaspoon of salt in 600 ml of water or a handful in a shallow bath. (

b) Pain relievers: include simple analgesics, ice (which can be soothing if applied directly to the sores) and creams with an anaesthetic component. Creams, however, can slow down drying and should therefore be used sparingly and only for pain relief. In addition, topical creams have limited value on moist mucosal surfaces, particularly in women.

c) Lose underclothing : preferably cotton (not nylon), can help minimize discomfort and allow healing.



d) Cool bath urination : For anyone experiencing extreme pain when urinating, the process can be less painful when done in a cool bath. And it is important to remember to drink plenty of fluids as this dilutes the urine.

There are, of course, proper antiviral therapies and special antiviral therapies which the Specialists do give to the patients. In the event of even the slightest doubt about Genital Herpes or any other STD, immediately contact the doctor or the hospital.

Prevention is better than cure :

The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, including genital herpes, is to abstain from sexual contact with an infected person. Genital ulcer diseases can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by a latex condom, as well as in areas that are not covered. Correct and consistent use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of genital herpes only when the infected area or site of potential exposure is protected. Since a condom may not cover all infected areas, even correct and consistent use of latex condoms cannot guarantee protection from genital herpes.

Counselling :

A diagnosis of genital herpes often comes as a shock. Adequate information about genital herpes and the implications for the future are an important part of clinical management and treatment and counselling helps a lot psychologically to the persons affected.

(Source of information: Dr.A. Kumar / Patient.co.uk/ medicalindia.org / health.ri.gov / medline Plus)

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Consultant**

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