

STD Prevention

'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' was an expression coined by Benjamin Franklin. This is so true for STDs. It is very smart to be educated about STD prevention and pregnancy prevention. Sex can be fun, and is part of our body functioning, but it can have catastrophic consequences, especially in women, if safety parameters are ignored.

STD prevention can be grouped in 3 categories: steps to be taken before sexual intercourse takes place, during sex and soon afterwards.

Before sexual intercourse (Pre-exposure)

1. Pre-exposure **vaccination** is one of the most effective methods for preventing transmission of human papillomavirus (HPV), Hepatitis A and B.
2. **Abstinence and Reduction of Number of Sex Partners.** The most reliable way to avoid transmission of STDs is to abstain from oral, vaginal, and anal sex or to be in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with a partner known to be uninfected.
3. **Male circumcision** reduces the risk for HIV and some STDs (such as HPV and Herpes) transmission in heterosexual men.

During sexual intercourse

1. **Condoms.** When male latex condoms are used consistently and correctly, they are highly effective in preventing the sexual transmission of HIV, HPV, Hepatitis B, syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in women.

Rate of condom breakage during sexual intercourse and withdrawal is approximately two broken condoms per 100 condoms. The failure of condoms to protect against STD or unintended pregnancy usually results from inconsistent or incorrect use rather than condom breakage.

Female condoms can provide protection from acquisition and transmission of STDs, although it is not known how effective they are.

Cervical diaphragms and spermicidal agents such as N-9 are not protective. N-9 can actually increase the risk of urinary tract infection and HIV transmission.

After Sexual intercourse (Post-exposure)

1. **Evaluation and treatment of infected partners.** Testing of the sexual partner and treatment accordingly is ideal, but even expedite treatment without testing is acceptable to decrease the spread of STDs. Counselling can be provided at the visit too, as well as testing for other STDs.

2. Refrain from intercourse or use condoms, for at least 7 days after completion of treatment.

3. HIV. After having a after sexual encounter with an HIV positive person, there are medications available that minimize the risk of acquiring HIV.

4. Retesting After Treatment to Detect Repeat Infections. Any person who tests positive for chlamydia or gonorrhea, along with women who test positive for trichomonas, should be rescreened 3-6 months after treatment.

5. Reporting to Public Health. The accurate and timely reporting of STDs is integral to public health efforts to assess trends, allocate resources, and assist local health authorities in partner notification and treatment. HIV, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia and trichomonas are reportable diseases. Public health professionals will contact the positive patient to verify the diagnosis and determine that treatments are provided accurately. Contacts can be traced to diminish the risk of spreading.

You should do your utmost to prevent STDS and unplanned pregnancies. Be smart!

Dr Roberto Leon