

CHAPTER 18  
Sexually transmitted infections

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# Sexually transmitted infections

## and other infections of the genitals

### CHAPTER 18

## What are sexually transmitted infections?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections that are passed from one person to another during sex. Men, women, and children can all be affected by STIs. Some common STIs are gonorrhea, chlamydia, trichomonas, syphilis, chancroid, herpes, hepatitis B, and HIV.

If a person has any of these signs, he or she may have an STI:

- bad-smelling discharge
- itching genitals
- painful genitals
- sores or blisters on the genitals
- pain in the pelvis or pain during sex

**It is also very common to have an STI and have no signs at all.** Many women and men have STIs but do not know it.



Untreated STIs can lead to very serious health problems, so anyone with an STI needs treatment as soon as possible. A woman with an untreated STI can develop a tubal pregnancy (see page 113), cancer of the cervix, or can become infertile (see page 30). An untreated STI in a pregnant woman can cause a baby to be born too early, too small, blind, sick, or dead. A person who has one STI can more easily get another — including HIV.

This chapter lists the different STIs a woman can have by describing the signs of each infection, then explains how to treat and prevent them. It also describes some other infections of the genitals that are common but are not transmitted sexually.

## How STIs are passed

To get an STI, a person must have close contact with someone who is already infected. The contact can be vaginal sex (penis in vagina), anal sex (penis in anus), or less often, oral sex (mouth on genitals or anus). STIs can sometimes pass from just rubbing an infected penis or vagina against another person's genitals. Many people get STIs from people who have no signs of being infected.

STIs can be prevented by not having sex with anyone who has an infection. Using condoms also prevents many STIs from spreading. To learn about preventing STIs, which is especially important during pregnancy, see pages 334 and 336 to 337.

Babies can also be infected with an STI through the mother's blood during pregnancy or during birth when they pass through the vagina.

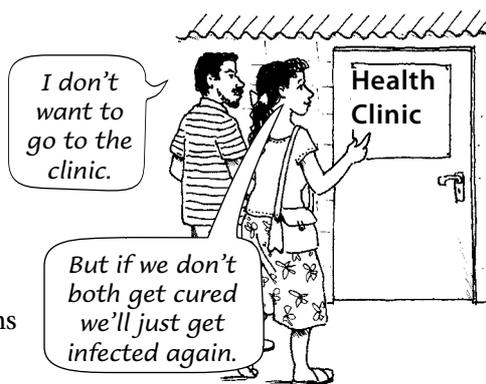
## Treating STIs

Most STIs will get better or go away if the person with the STI gets treated right away. But many women do not get treatment. A woman may not be able to afford treatment. She may feel embarrassed or ashamed. She may be afraid that her husband will think she had sex with someone else.

For these reasons, the way you care for a woman who may have an STI is very important. If a woman comes to you for help, do not tell anyone else what she told you. She may not come to you for help again. Do not criticize her. Answer her questions honestly, and as best as you can. If you cannot treat her infection, help her find low-cost care nearby.

### Remember:

- Treat STIs as soon as possible. Early treatment for STIs costs less and is more effective than later treatment.
- Treat partners too. Treating a woman for an STI will not help if her partner is still infected.
- Make sure the woman takes all the medicine she is given. Even if the signs of infection go away, a person must take all the medicine to cure the infection completely.



**Note:** All the medicines listed in this chapter are safe to take during pregnancy or while breastfeeding unless we include a warning that says they are not safe. Women who are not pregnant or breastfeeding may be able to take other, more effective drugs. See the book *Where Women Have No Doctor* or talk to a pharmacist to find out about other drugs.

## Discharge from the vagina

It is normal for women to have some discharge (wetness) from the vagina. This discharge is the way the vagina cleans itself. The discharge changes during the days of the monthly cycle and also during pregnancy.

But a major change in the amount, color, or smell of the vaginal discharge can mean there is an infection of the genitals. This infection could be an STI, or could be another type of infection.

STIs that might cause discharge from the vagina are chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomonas, or a vaginal infection that is not sexually transmitted, such as PID, yeast or BV.



## Chlamydia and gonorrhea (clap, the drip, gono)

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are both serious illnesses. But they are easy to cure if they are treated early. If they are not treated, they can lead to severe infection or infertility in women and men.

### *Signs in a woman*

Signs can start weeks or months after having sex with an infected person.



- yellow or green discharge from the vagina or anus
- pain or burning when urinating
- fever
- pain in the lower belly
- pain or bleeding during sex
- or no signs at all

Both men and women can have chlamydia or gonorrhea with no signs. And even a person with no signs can pass chlamydia or gonorrhea to another person.

### *Signs in a man*

Signs usually start 2 to 5 days after a man has sex with an infected person.



- discharge from the penis
- pain or burning while urinating
- pain or swelling in the testicles (balls)
- or no signs at all

### Treatment

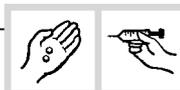
If possible, every pregnant woman should be tested for chlamydia and gonorrhea. If the test shows she has one or both of these infections, **she and her partner should be treated**. But if it is not possible for her to be tested, and she or her partner have signs of the infection, they should be treated anyway. It is better to treat someone who might be infected — even if you do not know for sure.

#### To treat chlamydia

- give 1 gram azithromycin.....by mouth, 1 time only  
**or**
- give 500 mg erythromycin.....by mouth, 4 times a day for 7 days  
**or**
- give 500 mg amoxicillin .....by mouth, 3 times a day for 7 days

#### To treat gonorrhea

- inject 250 mg ceftriaxone .....in the muscle, 1 time only  
**or**
- give 400 mg cefixime.....by mouth, 1 time only



It is very common to have chlamydia and gonorrhea at the same time. If you are not sure whether the woman has chlamydia or gonorrhea, or both, treat her and her partner for both infections.

**Note:** In the past, penicillin was used to cure gonorrhea. Now, in many places, penicillin will not kill gonorrhea anymore because of drug resistance (see page 468). Find out which drugs work best in your area.

### Problems in babies from chlamydia and gonorrhea

Women who have chlamydia or gonorrhea when they give birth can pass these infections on to their newborn babies. This can cause eye infection leading to blindness, or serious lung problems.

A chlamydia or gonorrhea infection in the eyes usually causes a thick yellow discharge from the eyes within the first month. To prevent eye infection in babies, put antibiotic ointment into each baby's eyes after birth (see page 260).



#### To treat chlamydia or gonorrhea or both:

If the baby is less than 7 days old

- Inject 125 mg ceftriaxone .....in the thigh muscle, 1 time only

If the baby is 7 to 28 days old

- inject 125 mg ceftriaxone .....in the thigh muscle, 1 time only  
**and**
- give 50 mg azithromycin .....by mouth, 1 time a day, for 3 days

**OR**

- inject 125 mg ceftriaxone .....in the thigh muscle, 1 time only  
**and**
- give 30 mg erythromycin.....by mouth, 4 times a day, for 14 days

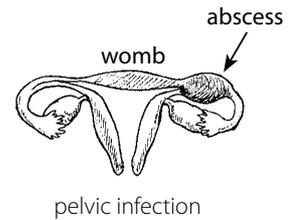


## Pelvic infection (pelvic inflammatory disease, or PID)

Pelvic inflammatory disease is a serious infection of a woman's womb, tubes, or ovaries.

A pelvic infection can happen when a woman has an STI, usually chlamydia or gonorrhea, that is not treated. It can also happen to a woman after an abortion or after a birth, when germs get into the woman's womb, tubes, or ovaries and cause infection.

If a pelvic infection is not treated, it can cause long-term pain for the woman. Women who have had pelvic infections have a greater chance of having a tubal pregnancy or of becoming infertile. Pelvic infection can even lead to death.



### Signs of pelvic infection

- pain in the lower belly
- high fever (more than 38°C or 100.4°F)
- feeling very ill or weak
- bad-smelling green or yellow discharge from the vagina
- pain or bleeding during sex

### To treat pelvic infections

A woman with a pelvic infection should take 3 medicines at once. One medicine to treat chlamydia, one to treat gonorrhea, and another antibiotic — metronidazole:

#### For chlamydia

- give 1 gram azithromycin.....by mouth, 1 time only  
**or**
- give 500 mg erythromycin.....by mouth, 2 times a day  
for 14 days  
**or**
- give 500 mg amoxicillin.....by mouth, 3 times a day  
for 7 days

#### AND for gonorrhea

- inject 250 mg ceftriaxone.....in the muscle, 1 time only  
**or**
- give 400 mg cefixime.....by mouth, 1 time only

#### AND to kill any other germs that cause pelvic infection

- give 400 to 500 mg metronidazole.....by mouth, 2 times a day  
for 14 days

#### Do not drink alcohol during the time you are taking metronidazole.

If the woman is not better after 2 days and 2 nights (48 hours), or if she has high fever or vomiting, she should go to a medical center right away. She needs strong IV medicines (in the vein).



## Trichomonas (trich)

Trichomonas infection can be very uncomfortable, but it is not dangerous itself. If untreated, it can make it easier to get other STIs including HIV, can make getting pregnant more difficult, or can make certain types of cancer more likely. In pregnant women, it can cause babies to be born earlier and smaller.

Some women who have trichomonas infections do not have any signs. Men usually have no signs but they can carry it in the penis and pass it to a woman during sex.

### Signs of trichomonas

- bubbly gray or yellow discharge
- bad-smelling discharge
- red and itchy genitals and vagina
- pain during sex or burning while urinating

To help the woman feel better, she can take a **sitz bath**. She should sit in a pan of clean, warm water for 15 minutes as often as possible. This is soothing to the genitals and will speed healing. She should not have sex until she and her partner are finished with treatment and all the signs are gone.



### To treat trichomonas

#### If the woman is pregnant:

- give 500 mg metronidazole..... by mouth, 2 times a day for 7 days
- Also treat the woman's partner with 2 g metronidazole by mouth, 1 time only.



## Yeast (candida, white discharge, fungus)

Yeast is not usually sexually transmitted, but it is a very common vaginal infection. It is especially common in pregnant women or women who are taking antibiotics or birth control pills. Men can also get yeast infections.

### Signs of yeast

- itchy genitals
- white, lumpy, sticky discharge
- bright red skin outside and inside the vagina that sometimes bleeds
- a burning feeling when urinating
- a smell like mold or bread dough from the vagina

### Treatment

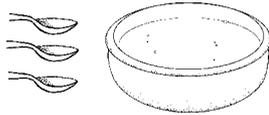
Yeast is not dangerous, but it is best to treat yeast in a pregnant woman before the birth, or the baby can get thrush (see page 290). Yeast may be cured using natural remedies.

#### Natural remedies for yeast infection

Mix vinegar or yogurt in a pan of clean warm water. The woman should sit in this liquid 2 times a day until she feels better.

*or she can also try making this mix:*

Mix 3 tablespoons of vinegar with 1 liter (quart) of boiled cool water.



Soak a piece of clean cotton wool in this mixture and insert the cotton into the vagina every night for 3 nights. Remove the cotton each morning.



If natural remedies do not work, try one of these medicines:

#### To treat yeast infection

- put one 100,000 Units nystatin insert or cream..... high in the vagina, each night for 14 nights
- or*
- put one 100 mg clotrimazole insert..... high in the vagina, each night for 5 nights
- or*
- put one 500 mg clotrimazole insert..... high in the vagina, for 1 night only



### Prevention

Wearing loose clothing and underclothes made of cotton, rather than polyester or nylon, lets air around the genitals. This helps prevent yeast. Wash or change the underclothes often. Do not put soap in the vagina when bathing. Do not douche.

## Bacterial vaginosis (BV, gardnerella)

Bacterial vaginosis is not sexually transmitted. It is not usually dangerous, but it can make it easier for women to get an STI, like HIV. It can cause pregnant women to have their babies too early. Many women who have bacterial vaginosis do not show signs.

### Signs of bacterial vaginosis

- more discharge than usual
- a bad, fishy smell from the vagina, especially after sex
- mild itching



### To treat bacterial vaginosis

- give 500 mg metronidazole..... by mouth, 2 times a day for 7 days

**or**

- give 250 mg metronidazole..... by mouth, 3 times a day for 7 days

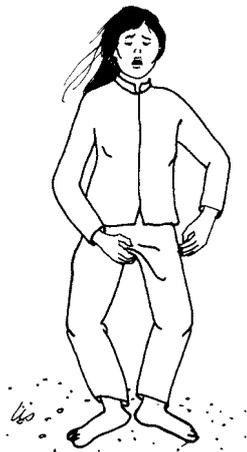
**or**

- give 300 mg clindamycin ..... by mouth, 2 times a day for 7 days

Also treat the woman's partner with 2 grams of metronidazole by mouth, one time only.

### Itching of the genitals

Itching of the genitals can have many causes. Itching around the opening of the vagina could be yeast or trichomonas.



Itching in the hair of the genitals or close to the genitals could be caused by scabies or lice. Scabies or lice can be treated with local remedies, or with medicines found in most pharmacies. For more information, see *Where There Is No Doctor* or another general medical book.

Some itching is caused by soaps or deodorants that have perfume in them. It can also be caused by plants and herbs that are used for douching or washing out the vagina. Wash with plain water and see if the itching goes away.

## Sores on the genitals (genital ulcers)

Most sores on the genitals are sexually transmitted. (There can be other causes of sores on the genitals — like boils or injuries.)

Sores on the genitals should be kept clean. Wash them with soap and water. Dry them carefully. Wash any cloth that you dry them with before you use it again.



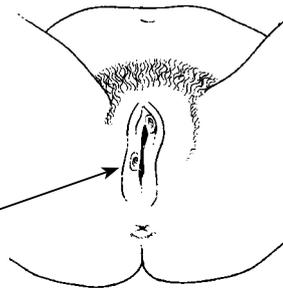
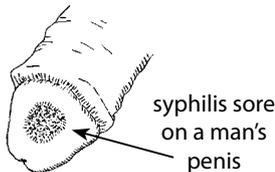
**WARNING!** Other infections, especially HIV, can easily pass through these sores on the genitals during sex. The best way to prevent passing infections from one person to another is to not have sex until your or your partner's sores have healed.

## Syphilis

Syphilis is a serious STI that affects the whole body. It can last for many years, getting worse and worse. Syphilis can be cured if it is treated early.

### Signs of syphilis

1. The first sign is a sore that may look like a pimple, a blister, or an open sore. It usually appears about 3 weeks after sex with a person who has syphilis, but sores can appear from 1 week to 3 months. This sore is full of germs, which are easily passed on to another person. The sore does not hurt, and if it is in a place where it isn't noticed (inside the vagina, anus, or throat), a person may not know she has it. But she can still infect anyone she has sex with. The sore lasts for only a few days or weeks and then goes away. But the infection is still there and continues to spread throughout the body.



2. Weeks or months later, the infected person may get a sore throat, mild fever, swollen joints, or a rash — especially on their hands, feet, belly, and sides. This rash contains syphilis germs which can be passed to others. Other signs are white patches or gray warts in the mouth or near the genitals. These contain large amounts of syphilis germs which can be passed to others.
3. All of these signs usually go away by themselves, but the disease continues. If a person with syphilis does not get treatment early, the syphilis germs can cause heart disease, paralysis, mental illness, and death.

## Syphilis and pregnancy

If a woman has syphilis when she is pregnant, her baby can be born too early, deformed, or dead. If possible, every pregnant woman should get a blood test to check for syphilis — especially if she has ever had sores on her genitals.



### To treat syphilis

If the person has had syphilis less than 2 years

- inject 2.4 million Units benzathine benzylpenicillin.....in the muscle, 1 time only

**or**

*if the person is allergic to penicillin:*

- give 500 mg erythromycin .....by mouth, 4 times a day for 14 days

**or**

- give 2 g azithromycin.....by mouth, 1 time only

If the person has had syphilis for 2 years or more, or if you don't know how long the person has had syphilis

- inject 2.4 million Units benzathine benzylpenicillin .....in the muscle, 1 time a week for 3 weeks

**or**

*if the person is allergic to penicillin:*

- give 500 mg erythromycin .....by mouth, 4 times a day for 30 days

Also give the same medicines to the woman's partner.

The erythromycin or azithromycin will treat the pregnant person but will not treat the baby. You will need to treat the newborn baby for syphilis soon after delivery (see page 480).



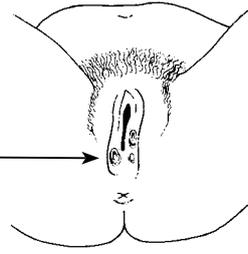
**WARNING!** It is very hard to tell the difference between syphilis and chancroid (see page 331). If you are not sure whether the woman has syphilis or chancroid, or both, you should treat for both. Also treat for both if both are common in your area.

## Chancroid

Chancroid is an STI that causes sores on the genitals. It is easily confused with syphilis.

### Signs of chancroid

- one or more soft, painful sores on the genitals or anus that bleed easily
- enlarged, painful glands (buboes) in the groin
- slight fever



### To treat chancroid

- give 1 g azithromycin.....by mouth, 1 time only

*or*

- give 500 mg erythromycin .....by mouth, 4 times a day for 7 days

*or*

- inject 250 mg ceftriaxone .....in the muscle, 1 time only



## Genital herpes

Genital herpes is a virus that causes painful blisters which burst and turn into sores on the skin. Herpes is spread when the sore on one person touches another person's skin — usually during vaginal or anal sex. Genital herpes usually affects the genitals or anus. Rarely, the sores may spread to the mouth during oral sex.

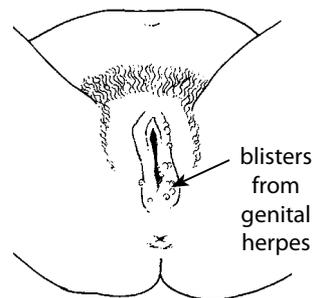
**Note:** Some sores on the mouth — called cold sores — are caused by another type of herpes. These sores may be passed from the mouth to the genitals during oral sex.

### Signs of herpes

- tingling, itching, or pain on the genitals
- small blisters that burst and form painful open sores on the genitals

Once a person has the virus, he or she can get sores many times. The first time a person has herpes sores, they can last 3 weeks or more. The person may also have fever, headaches, body aches, chills, and swollen lymph nodes near the genitals. The next infections are usually not as bad as the first one.

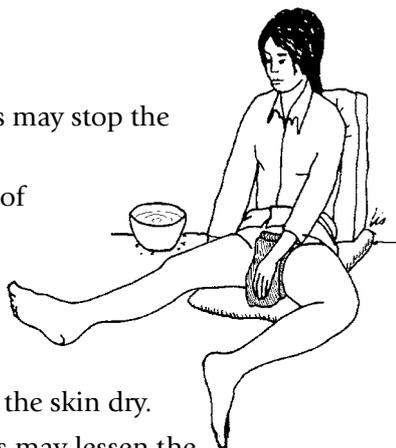
Herpes spreads more when a person has a sore, but it can also spread when there are no signs. People should not have sex when they have a sore, and should use condoms when they do not have sores. Internal (female) condoms may work better because they cover more of the genitals.



**Treatment**

To make the sores feel a little better:

- Put ice on the sore as soon as you feel it. This may stop the sore from getting worse.
- Soak a cloth in cooled black tea or tea made of cloves. Hold the wet cloth on the sores.
- Sit in a pan or bath of clean cool water.
- Mix water and baking soda or cornstarch into a paste and put it on the sore area.
- Apply witch hazel or a local plant that makes the skin dry.



There is no cure for herpes but these medicines may lessen the length and pain of outbreaks.

**For a first herpes outbreak**

- give 400 mg acyclovir.....by mouth, 3 times a day for 7 days

**For continuing herpes outbreaks**

- give 400 mg acyclovir.....by mouth, 3 times a day for 5 days

**For a woman with more than 6 herpes outbreaks a year**

- give 400 mg acyclovir.....by mouth, 2 times every day for 1 year.  
Then stop and see if the medicine is still needed.

**For a pregnant woman who has a herpes outbreak during her pregnancy**

- give 400 mg acyclovir.....by mouth, 2 times every day during the last month of pregnancy.

**To help with pain**

- give 500 to 1000 mg paracetamol.....by mouth, every 4-6 hours, until the pain goes away (do not take more than 4000 mg in a day)

A person with a lot of stress or other health problems is likely to get sores more often. So if possible, people with herpes should get plenty of rest and eat healthy food.



**WARNING!** Herpes is very dangerous for the eyes and can cause blindness. After touching a herpes sore, always wash your hands with soap and water.

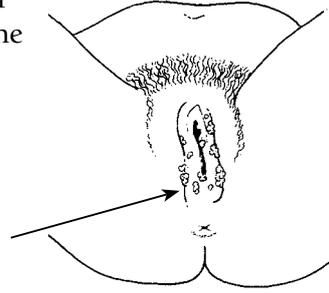
**Herpes and pregnancy**

It is possible for herpes to be passed from mother to baby, usually during delivery if the mother has vaginal sores at the time of birth. A first-time infection during pregnancy is even more likely to pass to the baby. For this reason, a woman in labor with an active herpes sore should give birth in a hospital, usually by caesarean surgery. Risk can be reduced or prevented by treating a first-time herpes outbreak immediately with acyclovir, whenever during pregnancy it occurs. A woman who already has had herpes and experienced an outbreak during pregnancy can use acyclovir daily during the last month of pregnancy.

## HPV (genital warts)

HPV is a virus that can cause warts to grow on the genitals or anus.

It is possible to have warts and not know it, especially if they are growing inside the vagina or inside the tip of the penis. The warts are not dangerous, but they can be uncomfortable.



### Signs of genital warts

- Itching.
- Small, dry bumps on or near the genitals or anus. The bumps do not hurt and may be red, brown, white, or the color of your skin.

**To test for HPV:** touch the warts with a mixture of plain vinegar and water. The warts will turn a whitish color if they are caused by HPV.



**WARNING!** Large, flat, wet growths that look like warts are not usually HPV. They may be caused by syphilis. Anyone with these growths should be tested for syphilis and not use the following treatment.

### Treatment

1. To protect the healthy skin, put petroleum gel (*Vaseline*) or another greasy ointment on the skin around each wart.
2. With a small stick, put a little trichloroacetic acid (TCA) 80% to 90% solution or bichloroacetic acid (BCA) on the wart. Leave the acid on until the wart turns white. Be careful not to spill the acid on the healthy skin. Wash the acid off after 30 minutes or if the burning feeling is very painful.

The acid should burn the wart off and leave a painful sore where the wart used to be.

Repeat the treatment once a week for 4-6 weeks for the wart to go away completely. Keep the sore clean and dry until it heals. The woman should not have sex until the sore heals.



The types of HPV that cause cancer in a woman's cervix are not the same types of HPV that cause warts. See page 380 to learn how to test a woman's cervix for HPV.

There are now 3 different vaccines for HPV. All protect against the 2 types of HPV that cause most of the cervical cancer in the world. All can be given to women until age 45, and some can be given to men until age 26. It is best to vaccinate boys and girls against HPV before they become sexually active.

## STIs that affect the whole body

### HIV infection and AIDS

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system. This is the part of our bodies that fights disease. HIV infection makes it more difficult for our bodies to fight off illness, which we are usually doing all the time. People with untreated HIV can become sick very easily with infections such as colds, flu, diarrhea, pneumonia, malaria, and tuberculosis. Cancers and malnutrition are also worse when people have HIV. HIV cannot be cured, but it can be controlled with medicines. A person who gets treatment, eats well, and cares for their body, mind, and spirit can live a long and healthy life.

HIV spreads when the infected blood, semen, or fluids from the vagina of someone who has HIV gets into another person's body. This happens mainly through:

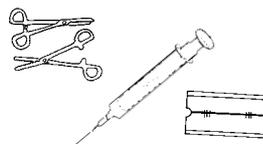
sex without a condom with someone who has HIV.



pregnancy or birth, if the mother has HIV.



unsterile needles, instruments or cutting tools.



In places where blood has not been tested for HIV, people can also get HIV from a blood transfusion. Sometimes when mothers with HIV are not taking ART medicines, their HIV can spread to their babies through breast milk (see page 293).

#### *Signs of HIV and AIDS*

People with HIV may not have any signs for a long time, up to 10 years. The only sure way to know if someone has HIV is with an HIV test. This is important because even without signs of illness, people can still spread HIV to others.

AIDS is the last stage of untreated HIV infection. Someone with AIDS can no longer fight infections. They are often ill and unable to get well, and may have illnesses no one usually gets without HIV, such as Kaposi's Sarcoma (a cancer).

#### *To prevent the spread of HIV, people should:*

- be tested for HIV, and if HIV positive, start treatment.
- get other infections treated.
- use condoms with any sex partner who has HIV or whose HIV status they do not know, or take PrEP if available (see page 498).
- not use syringes, needles, or other tools that could be dirty. Only cut skin with sterilized tools (see page 59). This includes the tools used for piercings, acupuncture, tattoos, scarring, or circumcision.



Two people who are both HIV negative and completely faithful to each other can have sex without using condoms and not get HIV from sex.

## Staying healthy with HIV

When someone's immune system is weakened by HIV, it is very important for them to prevent and treat other infections.

- The most important thing is to take ART — medicines that control HIV.
- If there are any signs of other STIs, like itching, a rash, a strange discharge or sores around the genitals, the person should see a health worker.
- People with HIV need to eat more food than those without HIV, and have a healthy diet (see page 33). Taking a multivitamin pill may also help.
- People with HIV need to protect themselves from tuberculosis (TB), which kills people with HIV more than any other illness. Someone with HIV should stay away from people with active TB, and if signs of TB develop (coughing, night sweats, fever, and weight loss), see a health worker right away.
- Anyone with HIV who does not have safe water should boil or disinfect drinking water to avoid diarrhea and other problems.

People with HIV also need emotional support. Encourage them to seek support from people they trust. They can learn a lot from others who are living with HIV.

Someone with HIV can also take a low-cost antibiotic called cotrimoxazole every day, which helps prevent many infections, such as mouth sores, diarrhea, rashes, colds and even malaria. See page 482.



### **Medicines that control HIV**

Medicines called antiretroviral therapy, or ART, make people with HIV much healthier and help them live much longer. These medicines also help prevent HIV transmission to a baby during pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding, and make HIV less able to spread during sex.

ART must be taken according to instructions, often every day at the same times, to keep working well. If a person stops taking it, or misses many doses, their HIV will grow strong enough to make them ill again. If they later restart taking ART, their HIV may be more difficult to treat.

Various medicine combinations are available for ART. More information on using ART medicines starts on page 495.

### **Helping people live with HIV**

Midwives can encourage people to get tested for HIV, learn how to support people taking ART, organize with others to increase access to these medicines, and educate the community to fight the stigma of HIV. To find ways to stop discrimination against people with HIV while working to stop the spread of HIV, see pages 99 to 101, and page 337.

## Hepatitis B and C

Hepatitis is an infection of the liver caused by several viruses. Two kinds, Hepatitis B and C, can be spread during sex or at other times if the blood or other body fluids from an infected person get into the body of a person who is not infected. Body fluids include blood, spit, wetness from the vagina, and semen. It can also spread from a pregnant woman to her baby.

### *Signs of hepatitis (including hepatitis B and C)*

- no appetite
- tired and weak feeling
- yellow eyes and sometimes yellow skin (especially the palms of the hands and soles of the feet)
- pain in the belly or nausea
- brown, cola-colored urine, and stools that look whitish
- or no signs at all

### *Treatment*

There are now medicines that can treat hepatitis B and C, and sometimes even can cure hepatitis C. Get tested at a health center and find out what medicines may be available.

People with hepatitis may feel better sooner if they rest, eat vegetable broths, soups and foods that are easy to digest, and do not drink any alcohol. Ginger drinks may help control nausea and vomiting.



## Hepatitis and pregnancy

If a woman has signs of hepatitis while she is pregnant, seek medical advice. The baby will need vaccinations after birth to prevent infection with Hepatitis B.

## Teaching women how to prevent STIs

Women should know that any sex partner may have an STI. A man has a much greater chance of having an STI if he has sex with other partners without using condoms.



Testing is the only sure way to know if a person has an STI. Find out if there is affordable STI testing in your area, and see page 379 to learn about testing you can do yourself.

The surest way for a woman to avoid getting an STI is for her to avoid having sex with anyone who might be infected. Or she can use internal (female) or external (male) condoms when she does have sex. Condoms protect very well against most STIs, although there is always some chance of getting an STI even with a condom.

Midwives can help protect women from HIV and hepatitis B by sterilizing any syringes or other tools used during birth or invasive procedures. See page 59.

**Midwives can teach a woman these ways to protect herself:**

- Use a condom every time she has sex.
- Do not have sex with someone who has signs of an STI (although many STIs spread even when the person has no signs).
- Do not douche or use herbs or powders to dry the vagina. When the vagina is dry or irritated by douches, sex can cause tiny cuts in the skin, making the woman more likely to be infected by HIV or other STIs.

If a man will not use a condom, these methods may give a woman a little protection from getting an STI:

- Use a diaphragm.
- Wash the outside of the genitals after sex.
- Urinate right after sex.

A woman and her partner can also have oral sex or other sexual touch instead of vaginal sex (see page 312).

## How to help stop STIs in your community

Here are some ideas to help prevent the spread of STIs in your community:

- Talk to the people you care for about STIs. Some people may feel embarrassed to talk about them, but knowing more may save their lives.
- During prenatal checkups, ask women about unusual discharge or sores on the genitals, or offer to examine them for signs of STIs.
- Organize a group to talk about health topics, including STIs and HIV.
- Support education about sex in your local school. Help parents understand that teaching about STIs, including HIV, helps young people make safer choices later on when they start having sex.
- Talk about condoms with men and help them understand the risks of STIs, including the risks to pregnant women and their babies.
- Find out from your local medical center, hospital, or Ministry of Health what STIs are the most common in your community.
- Find out what medicines to treat STIs work best in your area — and find out what they cost. Learn how to treat STIs, or help women find treatment.
- Start a community pharmacy so that it will be easier for people to get medicines and condoms.

*I want my daughters to be safe — but I don't know what to say. My mother never talked to me about this.*

*I know what you mean. Can we think of ways to explain this to them?*

