Sexually Transmitted Disease

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STD is an umbrella term that covers numerous sexually transmitted diseases. It is also interchangeably used as sexually transmitted infection (STI). However, both terms are slightly different from each other. If an individual has an STI, it means that he has an infection that is yet to be developed into a disease (Workowski & Bolan, 2015). For instance, if a woman has HPV but does not have any symptoms, then it means she has an infection as she is carrying a virus. In contrast, if a woman starts to develop cervical cancer from HPV, then it can be termed as STD since cancer is a disease. Similarly, if people have chlamydia or any other infection and develop a pelvic inflammatory disease, then it means they have STD.

Typically, STDs are passed from one individual to another after indulging in sexual activity. Regardless of sexual orientation and different ways of sexual activity, STDs can easily be spread via intimate physical contact. In most cases, the symptoms are mild and are not noticeable so there are chances that people have STI but are not aware of it. This makes people who are sexually active, more vulnerable and prone to getting an STI that may even turn into a disease.

If detected early, STIs can be treated effectively as there is a cure for almost every STI, however, if STIs turn into a disease, it is a bit challenging to cure them. For instance, HIV/AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease that has no cure. Although, AIDS can be caused through several other ways yet intimate contact is the main cause of a disease.

Specifically discussing the US, according to statistics, one out of every two sexually active people is at a great chance to come in contact with STI by the age of 25. Also, a survey conducted by the CDC highlighted that one out of every nine individuals has herpes which is a kind of STI. The survey results also showed that almost more than 80% of the population has HPV at some point in their lives which is alarming (*STD Data and Statistics*, 2020). The most common STIs are bacterial vaginosis, chlamydia, herpes, gonorrhea, along with HPV, PID, AIDS, etc.

Bacterial vaginosis is a common condition that occurs when there is a significant amount of bacteria in the vagina that disrupts the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina. This infection is very common in women ranging from 15-40 years old. Having multiple or a new sex partner is the reason for women getting bacterial vaginosis. Also, having BV can increase the chances of women getting other STD. Even the women who are pregnant are at an increased risk of having babies born with lower birth weight and premature delivery. The main symptoms are having a thin white discharge from the vagina along with pain and itching in the vagina and around the outside of the vagina. It is therefore recommended to take a test by providing a sample of vaginal fluid. The only way to avoid it is by limiting the number of sex partners or not having sex. However, if detected early, the disease is curable and can be treated by taking antibiotics (*CDC - STD Diseases & Related Conditions*, 2019).

Another most common STI that can infect both males and females is chlamydia. This can cause permanent damage to the reproductive system of a woman and make it impossible for a woman to get pregnant. An individual can get chlamydia by having oral, vaginal or even anal sex with someone who has chlamydia. Indulging in sexual activity with a male sex partner can risk the chances of an individual having chlamydia even if the male partner does not ejaculate. Also, women can transfer chlamydia to their babies during childbirth as well. To reduce the risk of getting chlamydia, it is necessary to avoid unprotected sex and always use latex condoms in the right way while also limiting the number of sex partners.

Bisexual, gay, and other men having oral or anal sex are also at increased risk of getting infected with Chlamydia. While discussing the symptoms, women having chlamydia may notice an abnormal vaginal discharge and burning sensation while urinating. While men may notice symptoms like discharge from the penis along with the burning sensation while urinating and pain in both the testicles (*CDC - STD Diseases & Related Conditions*, 2019).

Both men and women can get infected with chlamydia in their rectum that can result in severe rectal pain and bleeding. However, this can be cured if detected timely. If chlamydia remained untreated then in women it can spread to the uterus and fallopian tubes resulting in PID that is a pelvic inflammatory disease (Workowski & Bolan, 2015). In contrast, men rarely have any severe health issues if they get infected with chlamydia and it rarely prevents them from being able to have children.

Genital herpes is also one of the most common STD that is caused by two viruses called herpes simplex virus type 1 and types 2. Usually, oral herpes is caused by HSV-1. It results in old sores along with fever blisters around the mouth. Oral herpes can also spread from mouth to the genitals via oral sex. Herpes is very common in the US. According to the CDC, one out of every six individuals aged from 15 to 49 years has herpes (*CDC - STD Diseases & Related Conditions*, 2019). Genital herpes can spread through the saliva of an infected individual, herpes sore and skin in the genital area. Herpes can be avoided by limiting the number of sex partners and using latex condoms. Herpes can be cured through medication. It is necessary to avoid herpes during pregnancy since it can be transferred to an infant during delivery and can result in a deadly infection in a baby called neonatal herpes.

Another common STI is HPV that is also caused by vaginal, oral and anal sex with someone infected with this virus. Also, an individual can develop HPV years after engaging in sexual activity with someone infected with HPV. It can also result in genital warts and in severe cases it may result in cervical or other types of cancers such as cancer of vagina, vulva, and penis. There are HPV vaccines available and are recommended at the age of 12 and for everyone till the age of 26 (Workowski & Bolan, 2015). Vaccines are not recommended if anyone is above the age of 26. There is no specific way to test if an individual is HPV positive or not yet there are HPV tests that can be utilized to screen for cervical cancer however this test is not recommended to screen men and women under 30 years old.

There are many more types of STDs such as syphilis, trichomoniasis, etc yet AIDS is the most dangerous STD since it has no cure. Specifically discussing the US the individuals having gonorrhea or herpes are more prone to have HIV or have a chance to get HIV in the future as well. This is because the same behavior or circumstances can put an individual at an increased risk of having an STD can also put him or her at a greater risk of getting infected with HIV. Moreover, having a sore due to STD may also allow HIV to enter the body easily (Workowski & Bolan, 2015). It is, therefore, necessary to get tested for either STDs or HIV if an individual is sexually active.

Another STD that can infect both men and women is called gonorrhea. Like herpes, gonorrhea can cause infection in rectum, genitals, and throat as well. It can be spread via oral, anal and vaginal sex with an individual infected with the disease. A pregnant woman can also pass gonorrhea to her baby. If a male individual has gonorrhea can have symptoms such as burning sensation while urinating, white or yellowish discharge from the penis and swollen testicles. On the other hand, women having gonorrhea have symptoms such as vaginal bleeding and increased vaginal discharge. Gonorrhea can be cured however it is becoming a bit difficult to treat it since there are drug-resistant strains of gonorrhea as well. If it is remained untreated then it may result in ectopic pregnancy, infertility or even long-term abdominal or pelvic pain.

The main reason STIs or STDs are common is that many people are not aware of the disease also many remain undiagnosed with the disease since initially, symptoms are not visible. Another main reason due to which STIs and STDs are spreading is because of the stigma associated with both. This social stigma serves as a barrier to STI testing. The fear of negative societal attitude and shame associated with the diseases many people do not even consider to test for STI. In particular, teens are the ones who are remained undiagnosed. In recent years where people are experimenting with their sexuality, the spread of STDs is increasing day by day. Not only lesbian or gay people but heterosexual people who are indulged in oral sex are at an increased risk of having STIs (Workowski & Bolan, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to spread awareness among people so that they can be aware of the importance of protected sex. On the community level, it is necessary to promote safe sex behavior among people. Additionally, integrating STD control in primary and reproductive healthcare facilities can help a lot in controlling and preventing STDs and STIs.

**References**

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