

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS HANDOUT

ABOUT SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

- Sexually Transmitted Infections can be divided into 2 groups; those which can be treated and cured with medication, and those which cannot be cured by medication but whose symptoms may be treated.
- The first group of infections are caused by bacteria, fungal agents and parasitic organisms. These can usually be treated and cured by antibiotics or creams and lotions, especially if they are caught early enough.
- The second group of infections are caused by viruses. These include HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and genital warts (HPV). A vaccine is available for Hepatitis B and a vaccine for HPV is under development. A vaccine will not cure an infection if you are already infected. Symptoms can be treated, but once caught viral infections cannot be cured by medication. Recovery from some viruses is due to the body fighting the infection. Other viral infections are incurable.
- Some Sexually Transmitted Infections have no symptoms. You may not be aware that you are infected.
- Anyone can catch, carry and transmit a Sexually Transmitted Infection.

PUBIC LICE (Crabs)

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Pubic lice are related to head lice. Pubic lice lay eggs in coarse hair such as pubic hair. The lice spread through close body contact; this happens when people have sex but they can also be caught from towels, bed linen etc. Pubic lice can live on other coarse body and facial hairs, but not in the hair on the top of the head.

SYMPTOMS: The usual symptom is itching and irritation, which may manifest as a rash in the affected area. The lice may be seen by the naked eye, as can their eggs attached to hair shafts. Another indication may be their faeces, a black powdery substance found in underwear.

EFFECTS: Pubic lice pose no danger to health, but if left untreated they can spread to other parts of the body, such as armpits or legs which can make them more difficult to treat.

TREATMENT: A lotion is usually applied to kill the lice and their eggs.

PREVENTION: Wearing a condom will not prevent pubic lice. Knowing a partner's sexual history may prevent infection. Avoid sexual contact during infection and whilst undergoing treatment.

SCABIES (The Itch)

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Not strictly an STI, but caused by close body contact, which includes sex. Caused by a mite *Sarcoptes scabiei*; the female mite burrows into the skin where it lays its eggs.

SYMPTOMS: Symptoms occur between 2 – 6 weeks of the initial infection. When the mite larvae hatch an allergic reaction occurs which causes extreme irritation and itching. The mites burrows appear as thin lines under the skin.

EFFECTS: Scabies is highly contagious. Excessive scratching of affected areas can cause skin infections.

TREATMENT: Treated with a lotion or cream. Anti-histamines or a topical corticosteroid may be prescribed to relieve itching. Calamine lotion and cool showers or baths may also be useful in alleviating itching.

PREVENTION: Wearing a condom will not prevent scabies. Knowing a partner's sexual history may prevent infection. Avoid sexual contact during infection and whilst undergoing treatment.

THRUSH

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Caused by a naturally occurring yeast known as *Candida albicans*. This is normally kept in check by the body's immune system. It is commonly found in the mouth, vagina and under the foreskin. Not strictly a Sexually Transmitted Infection, but can develop when a person has sex with someone who already has it.

SYMPTOMS: Can cause Balanitis in men, an inflammation of the head of the penis; common symptoms of this include soreness and itching under the foreskin. In women symptoms include itching, irritation, a thick, white discharge from the vagina, and swelling of the vagina and vulva.

EFFECTS: Not a significant problem unless a person has a compromised immune system such as occurs with HIV/AIDS, in which case it can become a serious problem due to the body's inability to defend itself.

TREATMENT: Treated by a cream, or pessaries for women.

PREVENTION: Wear a condom. Avoid having unprotected sex.

TRICHOMONIASIS

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Transmitted through vaginal sex. Caused by a protozoan parasite called *Trichomonas vaginalis*.

SYMPTOMS: In women this causes an unpleasant frothy, yellowish vaginal discharge, a strong odour, and irritation of the vagina. No symptoms in men, but men can pass this on.

EFFECTS: The infection may cause discomfort during intercourse and urination, as well as irritation and itching of the female genital area.

TREATMENT: Treated with antibiotics.

PREVENTION: Wear a condom. Avoid having unprotected sex until after treatment.

GENITAL WARTS

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Genital/anal warts are caused by a virus called *Human Papilloma Virus* (HPV). There are over 80 types of HPV. Genital/anal warts are a common Sexually Transmitted Infection. They are spread through sexual contact and usually occur around the genitals or the anus. They can also (rarely) be passed on through oral sex.

SYMPTOMS: The warts appear as large or small growths or bumps which can be raised or flat and either single or multiple. They are usually flesh-coloured or whitish in appearance. Warts may cause itching, but don't usually cause burning, or pain.

EFFECTS: Most types of HPV are harmless, however some types have the potential to cause serious problems. Women may be at risk of developing cancer of the cervix. HPV has also been linked to cancers of the anus and penis.

TREATMENT: A lotion or freezing. Surgery is necessary in severe cases. The warts can be removed, but the virus that caused them may still remain in the body.

PREVENTION: Wearing a condom during sex may help to prevent genital/anal wart infection. Avoid having unprotected sex.

CHLAMYDIA (The Drip)

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Chlamydia is caused by a bacteria. It is the most common STI, and is especially common amongst young people. It can be passed on through vaginal or anal intercourse or via oral sex.

SYMPTOMS: There are often no symptoms with this infection. If they do occur, common symptoms include a discharge from the penis, vagina or anus, pain when urinating and swollen testicles. A sore throat may be an indication of oral infection. Chlamydia can also cause eye infections.

EFFECTS: If left untreated, Chlamydia can cause infertility in women and (less commonly) in men. It is also the biggest cause of blindness worldwide.

TREATMENT: Chlamydia can be treated with antibiotics.

PREVENTION: Using a condom should prevent Chlamydia. Avoid having unprotected sex.

GONORRHOEA (The Clap)

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Gonorrhoea is caused by a bacteria. It is sexually transmitted through genital, oral or anal contact.

SYMPTOMS: Common symptoms include a burning sensation when passing urine and a yellowish discharge from the penis or woman's urethra; or there may not be any symptoms.

EFFECTS: Fertility problems in both men and women, swollen testicles, pain and blood poisoning. A baby born to a woman infected with Gonorrhoea may get an eye infection which could result in blindness if left untreated.

TREATMENT: Gonorrhoea is treated with antibiotics.

PREVENTION: Wearing a condom should prevent this. Avoid having unprotected sex.

SYPHILIS (The Pox)

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Caused by a bacterium called *Treponema pallidum*. Syphilis can be transmitted through genital, anal, and oral sex.

SYMPTOMS: A sore called a chancre will appear on the genitals or mouth. This will go after a couple of weeks whether or not the syphilis is treated. A few months later a rash and other symptoms such as fatigue, sore throat, swollen lymph glands, patchy loss of hair and moist lumps around the anus and genitalia occur. These symptoms might disappear and reappear for a couple of years and then vanish.

EFFECTS: If left untreated, up to 30 years later a person infected with syphilis will develop serious conditions involving the brain, heart and spinal cord. These can result in death.

TREATMENT: Syphilis can be cured with antibiotics, but in the third stage of syphilis, damage that has been done to organs cannot be reversed.

PREVENTION: Using a condom should prevent Syphilis. Avoid having unprotected sex.

HERPES

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Caused by a virus and transmitted through sexual contact (genital, anal, or oral). It is possible that the herpes virus can be passed on even if the person transmitting the virus is not experiencing any symptoms.

SYMPTOMS: Swollen lymph glands, including those in the groin area. Cold sores around the mouth and raw, painful ulcers around the genitals. The sores or ulcers will eventually go away, but they may recur when a person is feeling run down; they usually reappear near the original sore or ulcer. Some people never develop any symptoms and don't know they are infected.

EFFECTS: Whilst the sores and ulcers remain open, the infected person will feel unwell, feverish, and exhausted. During an outbreak the affected area may feel itchy, burn or tingle. Once caught, the virus remains in the body.

TREATMENT: Antiviral medication is available to control symptoms, but there is no cure.

PREVENTION: Using a condom may prevent herpes. Avoid having unprotected sex.

NON SPECIFIC URETHRITIS (NSU)

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Most cases of NSU are sexually transmitted; several types of bacteria can cause this infection, Chlamydia being the most common cause. NSU can sometimes occur without being sexually transmitted, through bladder or urine infections, especially if the person is feeling run down.

SYMPTOMS: Inflammation of the urethra in men, which can cause a painful burning sensation when passing urine. A cloudy discharge from the penis is another common symptom. Usually causes no symptoms in women.

EFFECTS: In women NSU may develop into Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, which can result in infertility if left untreated. In men it can lead to painful swollen testicles, fertility problems, and pain in the groin area if the prostate gland becomes infected.

TREATMENT: NSU is treated with antibiotics.

PREVENTION: Wear a condom. Avoid having unprotected sex until after treatment.

HEPATITIS B (Hep B)

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Hepatitis B is caused by a virus. It can be transmitted through sex (vaginal, anal or oral) or spread by blood-to-blood contact (e.g. sharing needles). An infected mother can pass it onto her baby.

SYMPTOMS: A person infected with Hepatitis B may not have any symptoms (but still be infectious) or could be very ill with a fever, vomiting, and jaundice.

EFFECTS: Hepatitis B can damage the liver; Hepatitis B may cause cancer of the liver. Hepatitis B can be fatal in some cases.

TREATMENT: There is no treatment for this infection. A vaccine is available, but there is no treatment if the person is already infected. Most people make a recovery due to their own body fighting the virus.

PREVENTION: Wear a condom. Avoid having unprotected sex. Don't share needles.

HIV/AIDS

HOW IS IT CAUGHT? Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the name of a virus that causes a number of serious conditions known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The virus is spread by blood-to-blood contact (e.g. sharing needles) and sex (vaginal, anal and oral).

SYMPTOMS: Some people with HIV/AIDS may not experience any symptoms for years, but many people have symptoms in the first few months after becoming infected. Symptoms can include fever, fatigue, muscle pains, a rash, headache, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

EFFECTS: People infected with HIV can delay the onset of AIDS via treatment, but eventually serious infections and cancers develop, some of which can result in death.

TREATMENT: Medication to treat symptoms; but there is no cure. The treatments available may prolong lifespan, but there is no cure.

PREVENTION: Wear a condom. Avoid having unprotected sex. Don't share needles.