

How STDs Impact Women Differently From Men

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) remain a major public health concern in the U.S., especially among women, who disproportionately bear the long-term consequences of STDs. For example, each year untreated STDs cause infertility in at least 20,000 women in the U.S., and a pregnant woman is highly likely to pass syphilis unto her unborn baby if left untested or untreated. Most STDs are preventable and curable. There is a vaccine to prevent HPV. Most STDs can be cured with antibiotics, averting serious health consequences and preventing transmission to others.

1 Women are less likely than men to have symptoms of common STDs such as chlamydia and gonorrhea.

- If symptoms do occur, they can go away even though the infection may remain.

2 Women are more likely than men to confuse symptoms of an STD for something else.

- Women often have normal discharge or think that burning/itching is related to a yeast infection.
- Men usually notice symptoms like discharge because it is unusual.

3 Women may not see symptoms as easily as men.

- Genital ulcers (like from herpes or syphilis) can occur in the vagina and may not be easily visible, while men may be more likely to notice sores on their penis.

4 Women typically see their doctor more often than men.

- Women should use this time with their doctor as an opportunity to ask for STD testing, and not assume STD testing is part of their annual exam. While the Pap test screens for cervical cancer, it is not a good test for other types of cancer or STDs.

5 A woman's anatomy can place her at a unique risk for STD infection.

- The lining of the vagina is thinner and more delicate than the skin on a penis, so it's easier for bacteria and viruses to penetrate.
- The vagina is a good environment for bacteria to grow.

6 STDs can lead to serious health complications and affect a woman's future reproductive plans.

- Untreated STDs can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease, which can result in infertility and ectopic pregnancy.

7 Women who are pregnant can pass STDs to their babies

- Genital herpes, syphilis and HIV can be passed to babies during pregnancy and at delivery.
- The harmful effects of STDs in babies may include stillbirth, low birth weight (less than five pounds), brain damage, blindness and deafness.

8 Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in women, and is the main cause of cervical cancer.

- While HPV is also very common in men, most do not develop any serious health problems.

THERE ARE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR WOMEN PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR PARTNER(S) FROM STDs

- Healthcare providers — can provide patient-specific information about STD prevention, tests, and treatment.
- 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) — Operators and/or trained professionals with [CDC-INFO](http://www.cdc.gov/1800CDCINFO) can provide basic information on STDs and point callers to online STD resources and local STD testing sites.
- Websites like [cdc.gov/std](http://www.cdc.gov/std) and [gettested.cdc.gov](http://www.gettested.cdc.gov) can provide information about STDs, testing locations around the US, and available vaccines.

Other information requests may be directed to the Division of STD Prevention (www.cdc.gov/std) or the CDC-INFO Contact Center: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) or <http://www.cdc.gov/info>.