

It's Your Life

Can you make the right decisions?

Information on Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Marriage, Children
and Teen Pregnancy

by Larry Plachno

It is increasingly difficult to make intelligent decisions in our permissive and politically correct society. Newspapers, television, and even schools and government agencies are afraid to tell the truth for fear of offending someone or because it is not politically correct. Yet, the truth and correct information is available if you search for it.

In recent years the United States has faced an epidemic in Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). A recent report from the Center for Disease Control says that 19 million new STD infections occur every year in the United States. More than half of these infections involve young people age 25 or less. Worse yet, the American Social Health Association reports that half of all new HIV infections occur in teenagers.

This is a disaster for our society and our young people. While some STDs can be cured if discovered promptly, others cause various problems including pelvic pain, infertility and tubal pregnancy. Worse yet, some STDs cannot be cured and are fatal.

Here is some information that can help you make decisions on Sexually Transmitted Diseases, marriage, children and teen pregnancy.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Anyone who has done any current research into Sexually Transmitted Diseases will tell you that we are in the middle of an epidemic. Not much more than a generation ago, our society generally had to deal with only two STDs, Syphilis and Gonorrhea, which were then called venereal diseases.

Since then, problems with STDs have literally exploded because too many people have set aside caution and logic. New STDs that were unknown have appeared, some that were rare have become commonplace, and at least one has gotten worse. Today there are more than 25 STDs that are relatively common. They generally fit into five basic categories: Bacterial, Fungal, Viral, Parasites and Protozoal.



In general, the Fungal STDs and Parasites ("jock itch," yeast infections, and crab lice) cause the least problems and can be eliminated given proper care and treatment. Bacterial and Protozoal STDs (Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, and Trichomoniasis) will typically respond to antibiotics if detected early. However, they can cause damage if not detected early enough and some strains are now developing a resistance to antibiotics. Viral STDs (Hepatitis, Herpes, HPV and HIV) are the most dangerous because they are considered incurable.

One of the most important things to know is that many STDs may not have obvious symptoms in their early stages, and hence diagnosis and treatment may be delayed while they are passed on to others.

▪ **Syphilis** was nearly wiped out but is now spreading rapidly. It can generally be cured with penicillin but it may not be identified since the original small sore often disappears quickly. In its later stages it can lead to brain, heart

and blood vessel damage or even death if not treated. There were 46,277 newly reported cases of Syphilis in the United States in 2008.

- **Gonorrhea**, also known as “the clap,” may be difficult to diagnose. Men have approximately a 20 percent chance of getting the infection from a single act of intercourse with an infected woman but women have a 60 to 80 percent chance of getting the infection from a single act or intercourse with an infected man. Some strains of Gonorrhea are now resistant to penicillin. It can produce pelvic pain, vaginal discharge, and tubal pregnancy and could eventually affect joints and heart valves. There were 336,742 newly reported cases of Gonorrhea in 2008.

- **Chlamydia** has become an increasing concern. There were 1,210,523 newly reported cases in 2008 but health care professionals suggest that rates are probably higher because of under-diagnosis, perhaps as much as 2.8 million cases annually. Some reports suggest that Chlamydia has infected 40 percent of sexually active people and it hits women three times as hard as men. A single infection can result in a 25 percent chance of infertility for women with the chance of infertility rising to 50 percent with a second infection.

- **Trichomoniasis** is caused by a single cell protozoan parasite that kills and eats the cells in your body. Symptoms include inflammation of the cervix, urethra and vagina in women. There may also be a yellow-green vaginal discharge. Symptoms are less common in men. It may also put you at increased risk for HIV infection. Trichomoniasis is treatable and is considered one of the most common and curable STDs.

- **Crab Lice** are parasitic insects that infest human genitals and other areas with hair. They feed exclusively on human blood and apparently cannot survive except on a human body. Infection usually takes place through body contact but can also be through shared towels, clothing,



and beds. There is a standard treatment but it may also involve shaving off hair in the affected areas.

- **Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)** is increasingly widespread among sexually active people in the United States. It is a viral STD that is spread by an infected individual by direct contact with a lesion or body fluid, It can also be transmitted by simple skin-to-skin contact. Obvious symptoms include blisters and sores. There is no cure for herpes and once infected, the virus remains in your body for life.

- **Human Papilloma Virus or HPV** is an increasing concern. Various studies have shown it to be extremely common, infecting as many as 36 to 46 percent of sexually active females. HPV is the major cause of venereal warts that are difficult to treat. It can lead to cancer of the genitalia including cancer of the cervix and kills more women in the United States than many other diseases.

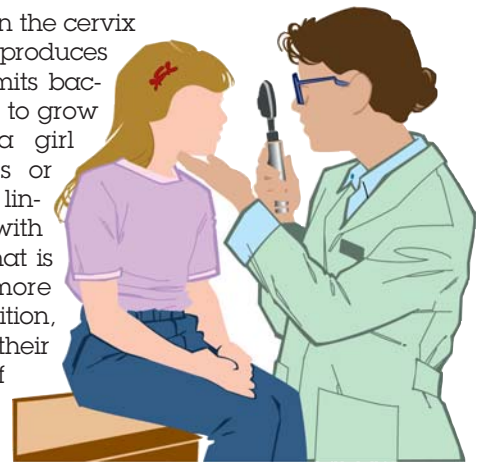
- **Human Immunodeficiency Virus or HIV** is one of the worst STDs because it leads to AIDS and hence is fatal. Since it is a virus, it can be easily transmitted and can even penetrate certain condoms. While progress from HIV to AIDS and death is slow for many people, there is no cure and once infected you are infected for life.

In addition to the usual STDs, sexual contact can also lead to infection with other diseases. The most obvious include Meningitis, Colds, Influenza and even Pneumonia.

Teenage Girls Face a Greater Risk

Between the ages of 14 and 19, STDs occur more frequently in girls than in boys by a ratio of nearly two to one. You should know that younger girls are at substantially increased risk for STDs.

The lining in the cervix of a teenage girl produces mucus that permits bacteria and viruses to grow easily. When a girl reaches her 20s or has a baby, this lining is replaced with another lining that is tougher and more resistant. In addition, young girls in their first two years of menstruation will have about half of their periods without ovulation. This results in even more mucus that will host bacteria or viruses and allow them to grow.



Because of this, there is a one-in-eight chance that a 15-year old girl will develop pelvic inflammatory disease simply by having sex. However, an older woman of 24 has only a one-in-eighty chance. What this means is that young girls are ten times more vulnerable.

Spreading Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Bear in mind that when you have sex with someone, as far as STDs are concerned, you are having sex with that person's previous sex partners, and their previous sex partners, and their previous sex partners, on and on. This is why STDs have become an epidemic.

▪ How do you know when someone is infected with an STD?

An infected person does not necessarily have any symptoms or signs that a virus or bacteria is actually hurting his or her body. They may not immediately have symptoms or feel sick. For example, a person can spread HIV infection at any time, even if he or she has not developed symptoms of AIDS.

The only sure way to tell if someone has STDs is to get tested. However, since many infections are not detectable immediately after exposure, enough time must be allowed prior to taking the tests to insure that the tests are accurate.

▪ How are Sexually Transmitted Diseases Spread?

Sexually Transmitted Diseases are generally spread by the exchange of body fluids or bodily contact of various types with an infected partner. While many people think that STDs are only spread by having traditional vaginal sex, that is far from true. STDs can be spread by shared dirty drug needles, oral sex, anal sex, kissing and even while breast feeding.

Many Sexually Transmitted Infections seem to be easier to transmit through oral sex and kissing. Some infections, such as herpes simplex and HPV can be transmitted simply by direct skin contact. Crab lice can be spread without direct contact through a shared towel or shared bed sheet.

Pathogens can infect you by passing through breaks or abrasions of the skin, even minute ones. The amount required to cause infection varies with each pathogen but it is always less than you can see with the naked eye.

Avoiding Sexually Transmitted Diseases

How can I avoid getting Sexually Transmitted Diseases? Here is information on some of the popular things people suggest.

▪ Birth Control Pills

Birth control pills either prevent conception or abort a new pregnancy. They do not protect you from getting STDs. Some studies suggest that you may be at an increased risk for contracting some STDs if you use hormonal contraception. There are also studies linking use of birth control pills with increased chance of breast and cervix cancer.

▪ Vaccines

There are vaccines available that protect against some viral sexually transmitted infections. This would include Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and some types of Human

Papilloma Virus (HPV). However, there are no vaccines to prevent other STDs including HIV/AIDS.

▪ Condoms

Condoms are hugely overrated as protection from STDs. They give a false sense of security and hence can create more problems than they solve. While condoms may be effective in limiting some types of exposure, they are woefully inadequate as total protection against STDs. One reason is that condoms only protect a small part of your body. A second reason is that condoms are not effective unless used properly, have a known failure rate, and may not protect against some STDs.

Condoms offer absolutely no protection on areas of the body where they are not used. This means that you can still get a sexually transmitted infection on other parts of your body. For example, condoms offer no protection for crab lice.

In addition to everything else, condoms are inherently untrustworthy. They have to be used correctly to offer any protection at all. Statistics vary but most reports indicate that condoms break between five and ten percent of the time and slip off between five and ten percent of the time. Some microorganisms and viruses are small enough to pass through the pores in some condoms. It is also true that condoms made of substances other than latex and polyurethane will not protect against HIV.

The obvious and logical conclusion with condoms is that if they worked properly, we would not be having this major epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases.

▪ Abstinence and Safe Sex

Anyone who has done any serious research on STDs will tell you that it is obvious that our bodies were not made to have multiple sex partners. There are only two ways to have "safe sex." One is to dress up like an astronaut to avoid any bodily contact. The second is limit sex to an uninfected partner for life, such as abstinence until marriage.



Almost all risk of STDs and out of wedlock pregnancy can be avoided by saving intercourse for marriage. Repeated studies show that abstinence works in preventing STDs as well as preventing out of wedlock pregnancy. In fact, repeated studies have shown that the big reason why we had so little STD and unwed pregnancies decades ago was because people waited until marriage to have intercourse. Factors that help in this area include:

- Supportive parents who encourage their children to abstain from sex until marriage.
- Regular attendance at school.
- Friends and a peer group that supports the decision to abstain from sex until marriage.
- Also abstaining from drug and alcohol use.

Marriage and Children

While people may talk about live-in partners and trial marriages, actual statistics overwhelmingly show that traditional marriage is the best decision for society, for the husband, for the wife, and for their children.

Married couples are less likely to live in poverty, less likely to be homeless, and less likely to need government assistance. With certain exceptions, they are more likely to be healthy and will recover faster from illness. Married people are less likely to commit crimes and less likely to be the victim of crimes. Married men are up to five times less likely to commit crimes and women are substantially less likely to be harmed by a husband than by a live-in partner.

Being married makes a big difference in your longevity. According to a 2010 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, people who were never married had an age-adjusted death rate 60.5 percent higher than those who were ever married and 2.1 times as high as married people.

Where are the best and worst places to meet a future spouse? Studies show that the best place to meet your future spouse is at church or a church activity. The worst place to meet a future spouse is in a bar, lounge or other place where alcoholic beverages are sold.

Regardless of where you meet someone, the best way to determine whether they are Mr. or Miss. Right for you is to find out their views on important things. Where do they stand on marriage, children, morals and similar questions? But, the most important question of all is whether they love you enough to make you their only sex partner for life?

Marriage also makes a big difference for children. There have been numerous reports over the years that show that children living with their biological married parents do as much as seven times better in their life as children in other types of households. What has become an increasing major concern are fatherless children who are raised without a father to teach them right and wrong. Various studies at different institutions show that as much as 75 percent of people who commit violent crimes were raised without a father to guide them.



Teen Pregnancy

The statistics surrounding teen pregnancy are very negative. Females age 15 through 19 are responsible for 12 percent of all births in the United States with about 75 percent of these girls being unmarried. Approximately 35 percent of these pregnancies end in abortion while less than 10 percent chose adoption.

Teen mothers typically will have less education than those who postpone childbearing. They are more likely to use tobacco and usually have less prenatal care. They are also more likely to live in poverty and receive welfare. Teen fathers generally will also have less education and lower earnings in later years.

Children of teen mothers statistically have lower birth weights, are more likely to be neglected or abused, and statistically are more likely to have learning disadvantages and health issues. Sons of teen mothers are statistically more likely to spend time in prison while daughters of teen mothers are statistically more likely to become teen mothers themselves.



About the author

Larry Plachno is a professional editor, author and researcher. He is also the father of seven children. The founder of Unselfish.org, he has spent more than 20 years researching America's social problems and is a leader in the areas of interconnected social problems and how selfishness, permissiveness and the pro-choice attitude spread through our society.



This document may be copied without charge. The only requirement is that it be copied intact. A PDF version of this document, suitable for printing on a computer printer, may be downloaded without charge at:
www.unselfish.org/pdf/iyl.pdf