

If you'd like to know more about STDs, pick up some more information from your local family planning clinic or search these websites:

- ✓ Advocates for Youth:
www.advocatesforyouth.org
- ✓ Reproductive Health Online:
www.reproline.jhu.edu
- ✓ The Men's Health Network:
www.menshealthnetwork.org
- ✓ WebMD: www.webmd.com



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Funded by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

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Family Planning Council of Iowa

The Gift No Man Wants to Get... or Give



**Sexually
Transmitted
Diseases**

Okay, you've been seeing this great person, but... you notice this little sore on the skin under your pubic hair.

Maybe it's a pimple, but it sure seems tender and it's definitely not pretty. You've heard about herpes but you can't believe you'd get that from your partner. Truth be told, a lot of guys have had a similar experience.

They get a sore on or around their genitals or maybe they have trouble, even pain, during urination (peeing) and they begin to wonder. And worry. There is a way to be sexually intimate with someone and be worry free.

Here's what you need to know:

You're Not Superman

You probably already know this because you don't run around wearing a blue bodysuit with a giant red "S" on it.

Seriously, bullets don't bounce off your chest and sexually transmitted diseases will come after you just as they do anyone else.

What is meant by "sexually transmitted disease" (STD)? An STD is a disease that can be passed from an infected person to an uninfected person through intimate sexual contact. Intimate sexual contact can mean sexual intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, and any other kind of intimate sexual touching. STDs can be passed through the exchange of body fluids or just skin-to-skin contact, if a partner has sores, ulcers or infected skin. Some STDs may have symptoms that can be seen and felt but others may not have any symptoms you can see or feel, at least right away.

Okay, are we clear about what an STD is? Good! Let's go on.

STDs could care less about how often you shower, how much money you make, where you worship, what you drive, or how many sexual partners you've had. One other thing, there is no place you can go to avoid the possibility of infection, except for consistent abstinence. You may live in the heartland of the country ten miles from the nearest small town and an STD can still find you, if you have sex.

The Best Defense

With STDs the best defense is a really good offense. You can protect yourself and your partner when you play by a few simple rules of sexual intimacy:

Talk. Get to know one another well enough first to have a really open and honest conversation about your sexual histories. This gives you both the first clue about whether there should be reason for extra caution.

Monogamy. A fancy word for being sexually intimate with only one person and not sleeping around. It's only as good as the commitment and trust you and your partner feel toward one another.

Get tested. Getting tested for STDs is easy, low-cost and confidential. You both need to be tested. If either of you is infected, treatment needs to be immediate and before you become sexually intimate.

Use protection. The three best defenses against sexually transmitted diseases are the male latex condom or female condom when you have sex or just don't have sex. The Pill, Norplant®, Depo-Provera®, and other hormonal birth control do not prevent the spread of disease. You've got three good choices in the condoms and abstinence. Pick one and use it every time in the right way.

Have an annual check up. Remember, some STDs can go unseen and unfelt. In order to know if you've gotten one of these, you'll have to see a doctor.

Don't Panic!

No method of protection is going to be 100% effective – not even sexual abstinence if you don't practice it correctly and consistently. An infection may still get through all the defenses you and your partner have erected. So, what if you become infected?

Really, don't panic! Some STDs are "home grown". That is, neither you nor your partner needs to have sex with someone else to get some infections.

See a doctor. Some STDs are easily cured, others are not and, unfortunately, some cannot be cured though the symptoms can be treated. The earlier you find out what you have, the easier the treatment.

Tell your partner. Your partner needs to be tested and treated right away, too. You may be afraid that your partner will think you've been unfaithful. Whether you have been or not, your partner needs to know for both of your sakes.

Tell ALL of your partners. No judgments here. Just saying that if you have more than one partner, all of them need to know. It's the right thing to do.

Hey, here's some good news!

You got that pimple-thing checked out and it really was just a pimple. Okay, you feel kind of stupid about making such a big deal out of such a little thing. And it really was kind of embarrassing to have the doctor examine it. But, you know, it really could have been a big thing like herpes. Embarrassment lasts for a few minutes but some STDs, like herpes, do last a lifetime.

Stay cool.

On the other hand, you may be on the receiving end of news about an STD from your current or former partner. Not the kind of thing you want to hear, right? Absolutely. So, what do you need to do?

Really, stay cool...really, really cool. Right now it doesn't matter HOW your partner got the STD, it just matters that you both get tested and treated. You may be angry, but stay focused. Get tested, get treated and move on.

If the news comes from a former partner, make sure you tell your current partner, who also needs to get tested and treated.

If the news comes from a current partner, follow doctor's orders completely and fully. It is important that both of you have the infection cleared up or controlled before you become sexually intimate again. Here's the thing...an STD can be bounced back and forth from one person to another for months if only one person gets treated or the treatment isn't completed.

Take extra precautions. If you've been depending on your ability to communicate, monogamy and regular testing to keep you safe from infection, you might need to also now begin to use a condom for added protection.