



# STIs & pregnancy

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections passed through sexual contact. They can be passed through vaginal, oral, or anal sex. STIs can also be passed from a mother to her baby. This can happen before or after the baby is born.



Women planning a pregnancy should be screened for STIs. So should women who are already pregnant.

Screening for HIV, hepatitis B, syphilis, chlamydia, and other STIs is a basic part of good prenatal care. Early detection and treatment are the key. With these, most women can have a safe delivery and a healthy baby. Without them, serious illness could result for both mother and baby.

STI	TREATMENT	SYMPTOMS IN THE MOTHER (IF ANY)	EFFECT ON THE MOTHER (IF ANY)	EFFECT ON THE BABY (IF ANY)
<b>Chlamydia</b> Caused by bacteria. 75% of women have no symptoms.	Cured with antibiotics for the mother. Baby is also given antibiotics if infected during delivery.	Yellow-green vaginal discharge, vaginal soreness, need to pass urine often, with burning or pain. Pain in belly. Low grade fever.	Major cause of pelvic inflammatory disease. Can lead to: Infertility, ectopic pregnancy	Can be passed on to baby during delivery. Can cause preterm birth; low birth weight; eye, ear, and lung infections.
<b>Genital Herpes</b> Caused by herpes simplex virus 1 or 2. Even when sores are present, more than 90% of all newborns don't get infected.	No cure. Oral medicine can treat and help prevent outbreaks.	Painful sores or blisters in the genital area. Swollen glands, fever, body aches with first outbreak. Future flare ups usually produce milder symptoms.	Pain, discomfort. A C-section may be needed. That's if sores or blisters are present at labor. Baby can be helped with treatment right after birth.	Miscarriage, preterm birth, birth defects, eye infections, central nervous system damage, death. Can be passed to baby during delivery or pregnancy.
<b>Gonorrhea</b> Caused by bacteria. 60-80% of women have no symptoms.	Cured with antibiotics for the mother. Newborns get special eye drops to prevent infection.	Mild itching and burning around vagina. White or yellow vaginal discharge.	Widespread infection, pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, blindness.	Eye infections, blindness, preterm birth or stillbirth. Can be passed to baby during delivery.
<b>Hepatitis B</b> Caused by a virus. Spreads through having sex or from contact with an infected person's blood or saliva.	Treated with rest. Do not take medicines that affect the liver. Vaccines can prevent this. Women who do not have hepatitis B can get these vaccines while pregnant.	Fatigue, fever, appetite loss, nausea and vomiting, and joint pain. Then, yellow color to the whites of the eyes and skin, dark urine, and clay-colored stools.	Can cause liver damage. Can lead to having the baby too early.	Hepatitis B vaccine and immune globulin are given within hours of birth. Two more doses of the vaccine are given later. This prevents infection.
<b>HIV/AIDS</b> HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system. It causes AIDS.	Medicines given to the mother lower the chance of giving HIV to the baby. The baby gets medicines after birth.	Chronic vaginal yeast infections; weight loss; swollen lymph nodes. Advanced stages: Skin infections, pneumonia, cancer, central nervous system problems.	Some women have viral diseases during pregnancy. Some cases are severe. A woman with AIDS may get sicker during pregnancy.	HIV can be passed to the baby during pregnancy, delivery, and through breast milk. Mothers with HIV should not breastfeed.
<b>HPV</b> Some types of HPV spread through sex and can cause genital warts.	Genital warts can be removed with medical treatment. May be advised to have this done after the baby is born.	Often, no symptoms are seen. Genital warts can take weeks, months, or years to show up.	Genital warts can block the birth canal or bleed a lot. If not treated before delivery, a C-section may be needed. Untreated HPV can lead to cervical cancer.	Slight chance that the baby could get warts on the vocal cords when he or she gets older.
[Note: 2-3 doses of HPV vaccine can prevent cervical cancer and genital warts that lead to it. All girls and boys age 11 to 12 years should get this. (HPV vaccines can be given between age 9 and age 26.) Pregnant women under age 26 should wait until the baby is born to get HPV vaccines.]				
<b>Syphilis</b> Caused by bacteria. It is one of the worst STIs, but can be treated.	Can be cured with antibiotics before the 5th month of pregnancy.	1st stage: Large, painless sore (chancre) where organism entered body (often genitals or lips). 2nd stage: Widespread skin rash, spotty hair loss, swollen glands, sore throat.	Can lead to heart failure, blindness, nervous system defects, death.	Can cause damage to skin, bones, eyes, teeth, liver. Can lead to vocal cord and breathing problems. May cause stillbirth. Can be passed to baby during pregnancy.



## TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Have you tested positive for HIV? Do you have an STI?

**NO**  
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**YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



Do you have genital herpes sores?  
Are you close to your due date?

**NO**  
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**YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



Do you take part in these high-risk activities for HIV?

- Sex without latex condoms and/or when drunk or high. (This does not apply if both of the following are true: You and your partner have sex only with each other. Neither of you are HIV positive.)
- Sex with more than one partner
- Sex with a partner who is a drug user
- Sex with a partner who has had more than one sex partner
- Injecting any drug with a shared needle or shared “works”

**NO**  
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**YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



Do you have a large, painless ulcer-like sore (chancre)? Is it in the genital area, anus, or mouth? Or did you have such a sore 2 to 6 weeks ago that healed, and are you now having flu-like symptoms (fever, headache, feeling generally ill), or a skin rash of small, red, scaling bumps that do not itch?

**NO**  
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**YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



Are you symptom-free, but worried that you may have an STI? Do you think a sex partner may have given you one? Do you want to rule out an STI because you have had more than one sex partner? Did a Pap test in the past show abnormal cells?

**NO**  
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**YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



**USE SELF-CARE**



## SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

If you do not have only one sexual partner with both of you being STI-free:

- Don't have sex if you don't know the other person's health status. Don't have sex if you don't know about your partner's sexual contacts.
- Discuss a new partner's sexual history. Do this before you have sex for the first time. Remember, people are not always honest about their sexual history. Don't be afraid to look before you have sex. Do you see any sores, or a rash, or a discharge?
- Latex and polyurethane male and female condoms can limit the spread of some STIs like HIV. Condoms cannot do away with the risk entirely.
- Plan ahead for safer sex. Practice what you will say.
- Insist that condoms be used every time you have sex. Using spermicidal foams, jellies, and creams don't add to the protection of condoms.
- Don't use these spermicides alone to protect against HIV and other STIs. As for lubricants, use water-based ones. Don't use oil-based or “petroleum” ones like Vaseline. They can damage latex condoms.

### Self-Care for Genital Herpes

- Bathe the genital area twice a day with mild soap and water. Gently pat dry with a towel or use a hair dryer set on warm. This dries sores and kills surface viruses.
- Apply an ice pack to the genital area for 5 to 10 minutes. This may help relieve itching and soreness.
- Wear loose pants or skirts. Don't wear pantyhose or tight-fitting clothing. Wear cotton underwear.
- Squirt tepid water over the genital area while you pass urine. This may help lessen the pain.
- Consult your health care provider before you take any pain medicine.
- Don't touch your eyes during an outbreak. You could spread the virus to your eyes.
- Avoid sexual intercourse: At the first sign of a herpes outbreak. When active sores are present. Up to 2 weeks after sores have gone away. **{Note: Herpes can spread when sores are not present.}**
- Exercise regularly and avoid stress. Stress can trigger outbreaks of herpes. Learn methods for relaxing.