



FROM YOUR PROVIDER, FOR YOUR HEALTH

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

And Men Who have Sex With Men

If you are a sexually active man who has sex with men (MSM), you should get tested regularly for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), even if you do not have symptoms. Most STDs are hard to recognize but could cause permanent damage to your body if you do not get tested and treated. Also, having an STD increases your risk of getting HIV.

You can only get an STD if someone you are intimate with has an STD, although he (or she) may have no symptoms or very mild symptoms. Proper use of condoms protects against fluid-transmitted STDs like gonorrhea, Chlamydia, and hepatitis. It is important to remember, however, that these STDs are also transmitted through oral sex. Condoms are less effective for skin-to-skin contact diseases like syphilis, HPV, and Herpes. Reducing your number of partners, avoiding drugs and alcohol while having sex, and talking to your partners about STDs can help reduce your risk of getting an STD.

Most STDs are easy to cure or manage. You can get tested by your primary care provider or at an STD clinic. An honest conversation with your healthcare provider about your sexual history will help you get the testing and treatment you need. You can bring this sheet with you to aid in your conversation.

SYPHILIS

Syphilis is again on the rise among MSM. If caught early, syphilis is easily cured with antibiotics. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that sexually active MSM get tested at least once a year for syphilis.

- *Transmission:* skin-to-skin contact with syphilis sore during oral, anal, and vaginal sex
- *Symptoms (early stages):* painless sore on or near genitals, mouth, or rectum; rash on hands/feet (most people do not notice these symptoms)
- *Long term (later stages):* brain damage, nerve damage, can be fatal
- *Treatment:* curable with antibiotics, but long-term damage can be permanent if left untreated
- *Test:* blood test, swab test of sore

GONORRHEA/CHLAMYDIA IN URETHRA, THROAT, AND ANUS

These common STDs can infect your urethra (the urine canal in your penis), anus and throat through giving and receiving anal and oral sex. There are tests for each exposed body part, and there are antibiotics to cure them. CDC recommends that sexually active MSM get tested at least once a year for gonorrhea and Chlamydia.

- *Transmission:* unprotected oral, anal, and vaginal sex
 - *Symptoms:* burning urination, discharge from penis or anus, anal itching, soreness or bleeding, sore throat; sometimes no symptoms
 - *Long term:* damage of urethra and urinary tract, sterility
 - *Treatment:* curable with antibiotics
 - *Test:* urine test, swab test of penis, anus, throat (only gonorrhea)
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HEPATITIS A & B

The *Hepatitis A virus (HAV)* is transmitted through the oral-fecal route--such as during rimming or by touching a penis or condom that has been inside someone's rectum and then putting one's fingers in one's mouth. The *Hepatitis B virus (HBV)* can be transmitted through anal sex. Both viruses attack the liver and can make a person very sick. There are no cures for either but both usually resolve on their own. Vaccines to prevent Hepatitis A and B are recommended for all MSM.

- *Transmission:* Blood contact directly or during unprotected oral, anal, and vaginal sex (HBV), or oral-anal/fecal contact (HAV)
- *Symptoms:* nausea, vomiting, fatigue, jaundice; sometimes no symptoms
- *Long term:* HAV usually self limited; about 10% infected with HBV develop chronic hepatitis
- *Treatment:* bed rest
- *Test:* blood test
- *Vaccine:* a vaccine is available for both HAV and HBV

GENITAL AND ANAL HPV

Most sexually active MSM carry the human papillomavirus (HPV). Generally HPV does not cause symptoms, but some people develop genital warts on the penis, scrotum, anus, or thighs. HPV has also been linked to rare cases of penile, anal and throat cancers. To screen for early signs of anal cancer, some clinicians recommend an anal Pap smear for MSM every 1-2 years (depending on HIV status). HIV positive people may be at higher risk for HPV-related cancers. Boys and young men can now get vaccinated for HPV.

- *Transmission:* skin-to-skin genital contact with infected area
- *Symptoms:* warts on or near genitals and anus; sometimes no symptoms
- *Long term:* abnormal cellular changes may progress to genital and anal cancers
- *Treatment:* warts removed surgically or frozen off by doctor. Warts may reappear after initial treatment and may require several treatments
- *Test:* visual inspection, anal Pap smear every 1-2 years
- *Vaccine:* an HPV vaccine for males ages 9-26 years has been approved. The vaccine protects against most, but not all of the wart- and cancer-related types of HPV. Because CDC has not yet recommend the vaccine be *routinely* applied among boys, some insurance carriers will not cover the cost. Consult your healthcare provider.

GENITAL HERPES

Herpes simplex viruses type 1 (HSV-1) or type 2 (HSV-2) are easily spread by skin-to-skin contact, especially if your partner has blisters or sores. Herpes outbreaks usually last 2-4 weeks, and can recur. Most people only have minimal symptoms. Herpes cannot be cured, but outbreaks tend to decrease over time, and medication can help. Oral herpes can be transmitted to the genital area and vice-versa. You can also spread herpes on yourself by touching a sore and then another part of the body. For this reason, touching sores should be avoided.

- *Transmission:* oral, anal, vaginal sex or kissing, skin-to-skin contact with an infected partner (sores may or may not be present)
- *Symptoms:* blisters/sores on genitals, thighs, buttocks, or mouth
- *Long term:* individuals vary, many continue to have regular outbreaks
- *Treatment:* no cure, but medications can reduce severity and number of outbreaks
- *Test:* visual, culture from sore, blood test

RESOURCES

- STD info, fact sheets, and Massachusetts testing sites: www.gettestedmass.org
- STD info from the Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov/std
- One-on-one correspondence with a medical provider regarding gay and other MSM's sexual health: www.fenwayhealth.org/doctorcox