

# For People Who Have Been Sexually Assaulted

## INFORMATION ABOUT SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs)

People who have been sexually assaulted often have concerns and questions about many subjects, including STDs. STDs are also sometimes referred to as sexually transmitted infections, or STIs.

If you do not understand this information, or would like additional information, ask your health care provider to assist you.

### Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

You can get an STD through vaginal, oral, or rectal sexual contact with someone who is infected. The most common bacterial STDs are chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis. The most serious viral STDs are HIV, hepatitis B, genital herpes, and genital warts. Some of these STDs can cause serious complications. For example, untreated gonorrhea and chlamydia can damage the reproductive organs, leading to miscarriage or infertility in women and sterility in men. Some viral STDs, like HIV, can lead to serious life threatening conditions. Certain STDs can also be transmitted from a pregnant woman to her unborn child.

### Risk of Getting an STD from Sexual Assault

The STDs that are diagnosed most frequently after sexual assault include gonorrhea or chlamydia. The risk of acquiring gonorrhea or chlamydia from sexual assault is low. The chances of acquiring syphilis or genital herpes are even lower. The risk of becoming infected with HIV is extremely low.

If an STD is diagnosed after a sexual assault, it does not always mean that the infection was acquired during the assault. However, a post-assault examination provides an important opportunity to identify and treat undetected STDs. For example, a person may have an STD (without knowing it) before being sexually assaulted. This could be the case when infected with chlamydia as about 3 out of 4 women and 1 out of 2 men will not have symptoms. Early treatment can prevent lasting harm.

### STD Signs and Symptoms

Some STDs cause symptoms such as itching, pain, discharge, bleeding, genital sores, or lower abdominal

pain. These symptoms may develop days, weeks, or even longer after a person becomes infected. But you can't depend on these symptoms to know if you are infected. Many people with an STD will not have any symptoms. Therefore, it is very important that you see a physician for an examination and STD tests to find out if you have been infected after a sexual assault, even if you don't have any symptoms.

### STD Testing and Treatment After Assault

After being sexually assaulted, it is important that you get a sexual assault examination as soon as possible. If you seek medical care within 120 hours of the assault, the health care provider who sees you may give you medications for certain STDs in case you were exposed to the diseases during the assault. Because these medications are not 100% effective in preventing disease, it is still important that you are aware of what to look for and return to your health care provider in two or three weeks to assure that you have been effectively treated.

For HIV risk, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) of antiretroviral drugs may be offered if the assault took place within 72 hours of your medical evaluation. PEP lowers the chances of HIV infection taking hold in the body after an exposure to HIV.

If you do not have a health care provider, there are many places that can provide low-cost or free, confidential testing for HIV and other STDs/STIs for victims of sexual assault, or anyone else who may have an infection. See Getting Tested for STDs and HIV below for more information.

Safe, effective treatment is available to cure gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis. Antibiotic treatment usually is based on the results of STD/STI tests. However, your physician may decide to treat you while waiting for the test results.

### Preventing STD Transmission to Sexual Partners

You can spread an STD to your partner(s) if you were infected during a sexual assault. Therefore, we recommend that you do not have sex until after you

have had follow-up tests two to three weeks after the assault and you have received the results.

If you do have oral, anal, or vaginal sex, it is important to use condoms or other barrier methods. Condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are highly effective in preventing transmission of HIV. In addition, correct use of condoms can reduce the risk of other STDs.

### **HIV/AIDS and Sexual Assault**

It is not easy to get HIV infection. The risk of becoming infected from a single sexual contact is very small. Penetration of the vagina or anus by a penis, or contact with blood, is the most likely way HIV would be transmitted during a sexual assault.

HIV infection is diagnosed by a blood test. Immediately after a sexual assault, contact a physician and get tested. The physician will repeat the test at different intervals up to six months. If the test is still negative after six months, you can be assured that you do not have HIV infection.

### **Testing Offenders**

Minnesota Law (Minnesota Statute 611A.19) allows the court to require HIV antibody testing after conviction of an offender. A sexual assault victim can request that a convicted offender be tested. Because conviction--if it occurs at all--does not take place immediately, testing the offender may not occur until months after the possible exposure. Therefore, finding out information about the individual who sexually assaulted you is not the best way of determining whether you are infected. The nature of the assault, the stage of any disease, your own immunity, and other factors make your own test result more important than the test results of an offender.

### **Get Tested for STDs and HIV**

There are many places that provide low-cost or free confidential STD and HIV Testing.

[GetTested \(gettested.cdc.gov\)](http://gettested.cdc.gov)

The national HIV, STD, and Hepatitis testing locator. You can search by zip code to find a testing location near you.

[STD Testing](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/stds/basics/stdtesting)

[www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/stds/basics/stdtesting](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/stds/basics/stdtesting)

Information about finding free or low-cost STD testing.

[HIV Testing](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/hiv/prevention/hiv-testing)

[www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/hiv/prevention/hiv-testing](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/hiv/prevention/hiv-testing)) Information about finding free or low-cost HIV testing.

### **For More Information**

If you have questions or concerns about STDs, ask your physician, hospital staff, or your local health department. If you have special concerns about sexual assault, contact your local sexual assault center. They can provide information, referrals, and support. Always seek expert medical advice if you believe that you have contracted an STD.

For information about STDs, HIV, or sexual assault, contact:

[Minnesota Family Planning and STD Hotline](http://sexualhealthmn.org)

[sexualhealthmn.org](http://sexualhealthmn.org)

Metro Area: 612-645-9630

Statewide: 1-800-783-2287

[Minnesota AIDSLine \(www.justushealth.org/aidslines\)](http://www.justushealth.org/aidslines)

Metro Area: 612-373-AIDS

TTY: 612-373-2465

Statewide: 1-800-248-AIDS

TTY: 1-888-820-2437

[Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault](http://www.mncasa.org)

[www.mncasa.org](http://www.mncasa.org)

Metro Area: 612-313-2797

Statewide: 1-800-964-8847

[National Sexual Assault Hotline \(www.rainn.org\)](http://www.rainn.org)

1-800-656-4673 answered 24/7

Minnesota Department of Health

STD/HIV Prevention Unit

PO Box 64975

St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

1-877-676-5414 or 651-201-5414

[www.health.state.mn.us/stds](http://www.health.state.mn.us/stds)

07/19

*To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.*