



Jeb Bush
Governor

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Secretary, Department of Health

PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April is STD Awareness Month

Pinellas County Health Department answers your questions about sexually transmitted diseases

What are STDs?

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are serious, sometimes painful diseases that can cause a lot of damage to you and your health. Some STDs infect your sexual and reproductive organs. Other STDs, such as HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis, cause severe general body infections.

Many STDs have no symptoms or they are too minor to notice. A lot of people wait for symptoms to appear before they get concerned. An STD can remain unless it is found and treated, with or without symptoms. The only way to know if you have an STD is to get tested.

It's important to know that there is no lifelong immunity once a person has had an STD or gets treated. A person can get infected again and again.

How do STDs spread from person to person?

STDs are spread during close, sexual activity and during vaginal, anal and oral sex. Some STDs (HIV and hepatitis B) are also spread by contact with infected blood. Most STD germs live in warm, moist areas. That's why they most often infect the mouth, rectum and sex organs (vagina, vulva, penis and testes).

What can be done about STDs?

If you think you might have an STD, you need to get checked. Don't just hope it will go away, because it won't! It may be embarrassing or uncomfortable for you to go to a doctor or clinic for help. But you must get treatment, no matter how hard it is for you to do. This is the only way you will get well.

You must also tell your sexual partner(s) that you have an STD. If you have an STD your partner(s) must get tested and treated, too. If your partner isn't treated, they can get sick. Your partner can also spread the STD to others. They might even give it to you again!

What are the symptoms?

Some people have no symptoms. If you do have symptoms, you may notice any of the following:

Symptoms that women may notice:

- ◆ An unusual discharge or smell from your vagina.
- ◆ Pain in your pelvic area
- ◆ Burning or itching around your vagina.
- ◆ Irregular vaginal bleeding.
- ◆ Pain deep inside your vagina when you have sex.

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Symptoms that men may notice:

A drip or discharge from your penis

Symptoms that women and men may notice:

- ◆ Sores, bumps, or blisters near your sex organs, rectum or mouth.
- ◆ Burning and pain when you urinate or have a bowel movement.
- ◆ Need to urinate often.
- ◆ Itching around your sex organs.
- ◆ A swelling or redness in your throat.
- ◆ Flu-like feelings, with fever, chills and aches.
- ◆ Swelling in your groin.

If you have any of these symptoms, you need to stop having sex. Go to an STD clinic or to your own health care provider. If you have an STD, don't have sex until your treatment is complete. *Don't put it off -- get checked right away.*

How can I protect myself from getting an STD?

- ◆ Not having sex is the best way to protect yourself from getting an STD.
- ◆ Having sex with only one uninfected partner who has only had sex with you is also safe.
- ◆ Talk to your partner about past sex partners and about any IV (needle) drug use.
- ◆ Then, before you have sex, look closely at your partner for any signs of STD - a rash, a sore, redness or discharge. If you see anything that you are worried about, don't have sex!
- ◆ Use a latex condom for vaginal, anal and oral sex.
- ◆ Get checked for STDs regularly if you are sexually active. We can help you decide how often and what tests you should have.
- ◆ Know the signs and symptoms of STDs. If you notice a symptom that worries you, get checked.

The Pinellas County Health Department has an STD clinic and program for confidential testing and treatment. Private physicians also treat STDs. Call us for more information at (727) 824-6900 or visit www.pinellashealth.com

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The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.
www.PinellasHealth.com