

Day for the Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections

Sexual and reproductive health is an integral part of overall well-being and quality of life. Despite advances in medicine, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) remain a global public health problem, affecting hundreds of millions of people worldwide every year.

What are sexually transmitted diseases?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a group of infectious diseases whose pathogens are transmitted primarily through sexual contact. The source of infection is an infected person or an asymptomatic carrier. Pathogenesis involves the key role of contact between the mucous membranes of the genitals, rectum, oropharynx, or conjunctiva with infected biological fluids (semen, vaginal secretion, blood, saliva).

The most common STIs include chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, trichomoniasis, human papillomavirus, herpes simplex virus, hepatitis B and C, and HIV.

The most important epidemiological feature of many STIs is **asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic presentation**. A person can be a carrier of an infection for years without knowing it, infecting sexual partners and being at risk of long-term complications.

STI symptoms, what to look for:

Signs that should prompt a visit to a doctor:

- Unusual discharge from the genitals.
- Pain, discomfort, burning, or itching in the genital area, urethra (especially during urination), rectum, or vagina.
- Appearance of any rash, sores, erosions, blisters, or lumps on the genitals, in the perianal area, or on the oral mucosa.
- Pain in the lower abdomen, in the pelvic area.
- Pain or discomfort during sexual intercourse (dyspareunia).
- Enlargement and tenderness of the inguinal lymph nodes.
- Bleeding outside the menstrual cycle or after sexual intercourse (in women).

It is important to understand: the absence of symptoms does not equal the absence of infection.

Risk factors:

- Having multiple sexual partners or a partner who has multiple partners.
- Sexual contact without the use of barrier protection (condoms).
- Sharing needles and syringes (for blood-borne STIs: HIV, hepatitis B and C).
- Having another STI increases the risk of HIV infection.
- Belonging to population groups such as sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), adolescents/young people who face barriers in accessing services and information.

Transmission mechanisms:

1. **Sexual route (main):** Infection occurs through unprotected sexual contact via microtrauma of mucous membranes and contact with infected biological fluids.
2. **Vertical (from mother to child):**

- **In utero** (through the placenta) -- characteristic of syphilis, HIV, cytomegalovirus.
 - **Intrapartum** (during childbirth when passing through an infected birth canal) -- the main route of transmission for gonorrhea, chlamydia, HSV, HPV, HIV.
 - **Postpartum** (through breastfeeding) -- relevant for HIV.
3. **Parenteral (through blood):**
 - When using non-sterile injection equipment (drugs, tattoos, piercings).
 - During transfusion of infected blood or its components (extremely rare in countries with a developed donor screening system).
 - When sharing razors, toothbrushes (relevant for hepatitis B).
 4. **Contact-household route:** Extremely rare for most STIs due to the instability of pathogens in the environment. Not significant for the transmission of HIV, hepatitis, syphilis, gonorrhea.

Prevention

1. Barrier method. The use of male and female condoms is the most effective way to prevent the transmission of most STIs.
2. Vaccination (against HPV, hepatitis B).
3. Regular STI testing, especially when changing partners or having risk factors.
4. Responsible behavior. Open conversation with a partner, mutual fidelity in a relationship, reducing the number of sexual partners.
5. Preventive treatment. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) are available and prescribed by a doctor.

Treatment of STIs must be prescribed ONLY by a specialist doctor (dermatovenerologist, gynecologist, urologist) after an accurate laboratory diagnosis is made. Self-diagnosis and self-treatment are unacceptable and dangerous!

Prevention of sexually transmitted infections is a culture of responsible attitude towards one's own body and the health of loved ones.

Most STIs, with modern medicine, are either completely curable with timely diagnosis or can be effectively controlled.

Your sexual and reproductive health is in your hands.

The information was presented by pathologist (heard) of the digital laboratory complex pathohistological studies, I.V. Grinchik.