



THE ROLE OF STD DETECTION AND TREATMENT

Testing and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can be an effective tool in preventing the spread of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. An understanding of the relationship between STDs and HIV infection can help in the development of effective HIV prevention programs for persons with high-risk sexual behaviors.

What is the link between STDs and HIV infection?

Individuals who are infected with STDs are at least two to five times more likely than uninfected individuals to acquire HIV if they are exposed to the virus through sexual contact. In addition, if an HIV-infected individual is also infected with another STD, that person is more likely to transmit HIV through sexual contact than other HIV-infected persons (Wasserheit, 1992).

Increased susceptibility. STDs probably increase susceptibility to HIV infection by two mechanisms. Genital ulcers (e.g., syphilis, herpes, or chancroid) result in breaks in the genital tract lining or skin. These breaks create a portal of entry for HIV. Non-ulcerative STDs (e.g., chlamydia, gonorrhea, and trichomoniasis) increase the concentration of cells in genital secretions that can serve as targets for HIV (e.g., CD4+ cells).

Increased infectiousness. Studies have shown that when HIV-infected individuals are also infected with other STDs, they are more likely to have HIV in their genital secretions. For example, men who are infected with both gonorrhea and HIV are more than twice as likely to shed HIV in their genital secretions than are those who are infected only with HIV. Moreover, the median concentration of HIV in semen is as much as 10 times higher in men who are infected with both gonorrhea and HIV than in men infected only with HIV.

How can STD treatment slow the spread of HIV infection?

Evidence from intervention studies indicates that detecting and treating STDs can substantially reduce HIV transmission at the individual and community levels. (Fleming, Wasserheit, 1999).



Frequently Asked Questions

What are the implications for HIV prevention programs?

Strong STD prevention, testing and treatment can play a vital role in comprehensive programs to prevent sexual transmission of HIV. Furthermore, STD trends can offer important insights into where the HIV epidemic may grow, making STD surveillance data helpful in forecasting where HIV rates are likely to increase. Better linkages are needed between HIV and STD prevention efforts nationwide in order to control both epidemics.

In the context of persistently high prevalence of STDs in many parts of the United States and with emerging evidence that the United States' HIV epidemic increasingly is affecting populations with the highest rates of curable STDs, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on HIV and STD Prevention (ACHSP) has recommended the following:

- Early detection and treatment of curable STDs should become a major, explicit component of comprehensive HIV prevention programs at national, state and local levels;
- In areas where STDs that facilitate HIV transmission are prevalent, screening and treatment programs should be expanded;
- HIV and STD prevention programs in the United States, together with private and public sector partners, should take joint responsibility for implementing these strategies.

For more information:

Call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-800-232-4636, TTY: 1-888-232-6348 in English and Spanish.