

## Prevention

By following the guidelines given to mankind in the Quran and sunnah of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, we find that living an Islamic way of life is one of the best ways to be protected from the dangers of most STDs.

By practicing abstinence if unmarried, and by limiting the number of sexual partners by only having intimate relations with one's spouse, a person can greatly reduce or eliminate the risk of transmitting the disease to others. Furthermore, the Quranic prohibition of anal sex and homosexual relationships also serves as a means to avoid the spread of STDs.

The use of male or female condoms, can sometimes prevent the transmission of an STD and should be used if you or your partner feel that there is a risk of spreading infection sexually. Spermicides like nonoxynol 9 are not effective protection against HIV or any other STD. If you have reason to believe that your partner may have an STD, do not hesitate to demand that some form of protection be used. Sexually transmitted diseases are dangerous to your health, and they are not all curable. If you do not watch out for your own health, no one else will.

### Helpful Resources

- California HIV/AIDS Hotline  
(800) 367-2437
- California STD Hotline  
(800) 758-0880
- Hepatitis Information Line  
(800)223-0179
- Southern California Hepatitis C Resource Center



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## Muslim Women's League

## Hepatitis A, B, & C, and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and



Each year, millions of women become infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). As Muslim women, most of us do not consider the risk of STD's to be a health issue for us. However, under some circumstances, such as polygamy, re-marriage, and the possibility of a spouse engaging in unlawful sexual relations, we are still at risk of being exposed to these diseases, even through lawful sexual contact. Hepatitis, another dangerous disease, is not always transmitted through sexual contact and is something that all women should be aware of. We urge you to read this short pamphlet and become more aware of the disease. There is no harm in choosing to be informed.

## Hepatitis A, B, and C

**Hepatitis A**, a viral disease, is spread through contaminated food or water and through oral and anal intercourse. It may cause loss of appetite, low-grade fever, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and yellow skin (jaundice), which usually lasts for one to two weeks. Its symptoms usually occur 15-50 days after infection, averaging within four weeks of exposure. In order to avoid infection, one may choose to do the following options: get vaccinated, eat fully cooked food, drink only filtered, bottled or boiled water, and use barriers when engaging in oral or anal sex. Tested through blood. The disease is treatable, but treatment is not always effective. Hepatitis A can lead to prolonged jaundice, inflammation of the liver, abnormal enzyme levels in the body and severe flu-like symptoms.

**Hepatitis B** is spread through the exchange of bodily fluids (blood, semen, and vaginal secretions) by sexual contact, sharing needles, toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers with an infected person. Tattooing or piercing are also ways of spreading the infection. Its initial symptoms, if any occur at all, are similar to those of hepatitis A and appear one to nine months after infection. Hepatitis B can lead to a chronic infection that can cause permanent liver damage or tumors in the liver. For chronic hepatitis B, symptoms may not appear for decades. One can avoid getting this infection by receiving the vaccination or by using clean needles and condoms. It can be detected by a blood test. However, like Hepatitis A, treatment is not always effective.

**Hepatitis C** is spread through the exchange of blood during sexual contact or by sharing needles. It is currently unclear if this virus can be spread through semen, vaginal secretions or saliva. Acute Hepatitis C 60-70% will have no symptoms, but if they do occur, one may experience weakness, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, and yellow skin. Symptoms occur two to fifteen weeks after infection. For chronic hepatitis C, symptoms may not appear for decades. Possible complications from the disease include permanent liver damage and cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver.

The hepatitis A vaccine given in the U.S. is an inactivated form of the hepatitis A virus. It is not possible to get the disease from the vaccine. A person receives one dose and then another dose in six months. After a person gets both doses of the vaccine, he/she is protected against hepatitis A for life. There are some

cases in which the vaccine is not effective but this is very rare. The hepatitis A vaccine does not protect against hepatitis B or hepatitis C. There is a separate three-dose vaccine for hepatitis B, but there is no vaccine for hepatitis C. If you have already been infected with hepatitis A, you do not need to get vaccinated. There are tests available to see if you have previously been infected and have built immunity.

## HIV

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), is spread through sexual contact (oral, vaginal, and anal), by sharing needles, or pre-natally (passed from mother to child during pregnancy). The fluids known to transmit HIV are blood, semen, pre-seminal fluid, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. Saliva does not transmit HIV, and the virus does not live or become replicated outside the body. Therefore, the chance of transmission through an external setting is zero. HIV weakens the immune system, the body's ability to fight infection. Some women have no symptoms while others experience repeated yeast infections, unexplained weight loss, flu-like symptoms (night sweats, chills, and diarrhea) in the first two months of infection. More severe health complications usually do not occur until a person has been infected for more than five years. HIV can be tested either through blood or orally. There is no cure for HIV, but drug therapy has been extremely effective for many women.

# Learn About STDs and Hepatitis

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are contagious diseases that are spread through oral, anal or vaginal sexual contact with an infected person. Transmission can occur by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected area or by exchanging body fluids such as semen, pre-seminal fluid, vaginal secretions, or blood. STDs are placed into three different categories: bacterial, viral, and parasitic, depending on the type of infection. Bacterial and parasitic infections can be cured with proper treatment. A viral infection is incurable although for many types, there are effective forms of treatment. This brochure will provide you with some general information about STDs in women as well as ways of preventing them.

Although many infected women do not show symptoms of having an STD, they can spread the infection to others. It is possible to have more than one STD at one time. In fact, having an STD may increase a woman's risk of acquiring another STD as well as having severe medical problems. It is important to protect yourself and be screened yearly, if you have possibly placed yourself at risk. Going in for a Pap smear or a physical is no guarantee that you have been tested for STDs. Please ask your doctor to test you specifically for STDs if you are at risk.

If you do not want to visit your doctor or do not have one, the local health department may have a clinic in your area. Regardless of the circumstance in which an STD was contracted, it is crucial that you see a healthcare provider. He/she will provide you with the necessary treatment both confidentially and without passing judgment.

## Bacterial STDs

### Syphilis

Syphilis is a bacterial infection that can be easily cured if treated early. It is transmitted by skin to skin contact with the infected area or by the exchange of bodily fluids. Its symptoms can easily be missed or ignored. Some women notice a painless open sore, or chancre, that may occur in 10-90 days after exposure, lasting three to six weeks. After the sore, a rash may follow in 4-10 weeks, lasting between two to six weeks. Although its symptoms disappear, the syphilis bacteria is still present and is possibly damaging the body. Complications caused by this disease include: bladder problems, heart disease, hair and weight loss, blindness, and damage to the brain and spine. A blood sample is taken and analyzed to determine the presence of syphilis.

### Chlamydia and Gonorrhea

Like syphilis, both chlamydia and gonorrhea can be easily cured if treated early. Transmission occurs when body fluids are exchanged. Many women have no symptoms. However, some people may experience a burning sensation during urination, frequent urination, discharge (possible yellow, green, white, clear or milky), tingling, or itching. After exposure, symptoms can appear within two to fourteen days for gonorrhea and seven to twenty one days for chlamydia. Testing for these diseases is done through urine analysis or by taking a vaginal culture. If chlamydia infection goes untreated, the disease can lead to infertility (inability to become pregnant), chronic pelvic pain, and damage to reproductive organs. If untreated, gonorrhea may cause heart trouble, skin disease and arthritis.

### Bacterial vaginosis

Bacterial vaginosis, also known as BV, is usually caused by an overgrowth of bacteria that normally live in the vagina. This condition can occur naturally, and may be caused by a sudden change of the normal environment in the vagina, thus leading to symptoms of BV. Many women have no symptoms, or their symptoms may be too mild to notice. Some may experience a thin, white or gray vaginal discharge. Many women complain of an unpleasant, strong or fishy-smelling odor. Women sometimes feel burning during urination or itching in the vagina. BV is often mistaken for a yeast infection, and many women may try to treat the condition on their own, using the wrong medication. Little is known about what causes the overgrowth of bacteria, but it has been associated with a change in sexual partners or the use of douches, scented hygiene products, and bubble

baths. If not treated, BV can cause complications during pregnancy or pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), an infection of the upper genital tract, which affects the uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tube. PID, if not controlled, can lead to infertility, tubal pregnancy, chronic pelvic pain, and other serious conditions. Bacterial vaginosis can be tested by a culture of vaginal discharge and successfully treated.

### NGU

NGU stands for non-gonococcal urethritis. NGU is a bacteria that affects the urethra (the tube that passes urine). When a woman is diagnosed with NGU she has tested negative for gonorrhea, but a bacterial infection is still present. The disease can be caused by a number of different bacteria. NGU is usually spread by vaginal, oral and anal sex and usually results in itching, milky or mucous-like discharge, a burning sensation during urination, or pain during intercourse. Symptoms, which appear during the morning, usually occur seven to twenty one days after sexual contact and are very similar to those of gonorrhea. However, many women do not know they are infected because they do not have any symptoms. NGU is easily treated with antibiotics.

NSU, or nonspecific urethritis, is another name for NGU. In the case of NSU, the cause of the bacterial infection is unknown, even after testing has been done. In women, other STDs, such as chlamydia, herpes, or trichomoniasis usually cause NGU. A woman that has untreated NGU caused by chlamydia is at great risk for developing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). NGU can be tested through urine analysis or culture of the vaginal discharge.

## Parasitic STDs

### Crabs (Pubic Lice)

Crabs, or pubic lice, is a parasitic infection that is transmitted by either skin to skin contact with an infected person, or by sharing towels, sheets or clothing with someone who has crabs. Symptoms of this infection, which appear between seven to thirteen days after infection, include itching, usually around the genital area or abdomen, skin redness, and numerous bites over a short period of time. These bites may lead to irritability, mild fever, and muscle aches. The presence of crabs can be tested through a clinical exam. Prolonged infection can lead to blue spots on the skin and infection from scratching.

## Trichomoniasis

Trichomoniasis is an infection caused by a parasite. Trichomoniasis is usually transmitted through vaginal sex, but may be transmitted by sharing towels, clothing or mother to child. It usually affects woman. Many women do not have any symptoms. If symptoms due occur they can be yellow-green, frothy, foul-smelling discharge from the vagina, itching or tenderness in the vagina, pain during sex, pain in the abdominal area, increase need to urinate and bleeding in between periods. The infection is treatable and is not known to cause any serious long-term effects. In women, symptoms usually appear 4 - 20 days after sexual contact or within 6 months of being infected. Many women may be infected for many months without experiencing symptoms. Trichomoniasis can be diagnosed by culturing vaginal discharge or vaginal or urethral secretions.

## Viral STDs

### Genital Warts

This type of viral infection, transmitted by skin to skin contact with an infected area, causes warts to develop either externally or internally on the genitals, anus or mouth. The warts look like fleshy bumps or flat discolored spots, and they can be compared to the shape and texture of cauliflower.

Genital warts can appear one to eight months after exposure, but they generally appear within the first two to three months. After treatment, some women never have another outbreak of warts, where as others have recurring outbreaks. Even if symptoms are not present, the virus can still be spread to others. This disease may lead to recurring infections, spreading, and possibly cancer. A clinical exam or biopsy is used to test for genital warts. Genital warts cannot be cure, but it can be treated.

### Herpes

Herpes is a viral infection transmitted by skin to skin contact with the infected area. Many women have no symptoms. In fact, they can have herpes for years and do not know it. Herpes can be located either externally or internally on the genitals, anus or mouth. It may appear from one to thirty days after exposure, often causing small, painful blisters. A clinical exam and culture are the best methods for diagnosing herpes. There is a blood test but results are not always reliable. Herpes can lead to recurring infections, spreading, and meningitis. Although this disease is incurable its complications can be reduced with treatment.