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

Hepatitis A, a viral disease, is spread through contaminated food or water and through oral and anal intercourse. It may cause severe acute hepatitis, 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.

Helpful Resources

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

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, remarriage, 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.

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.

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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 the same 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. If you have possibly placed yourself at risk, go 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 circumstances 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

Bacterial STDs are caused by bacteria and can be transmitted by either skin to skin contact with an infected person, or by sharing towels, sheets or clothing with someone who has an STD. Symptoms of these infections include itching, burning during urination, or pain during intercourse. Some symptoms appear during the first week of infection, while others occur from one to thirty days after exposure.

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. NGU (gonococcal urethritis) is a gonorrhea infection of the urethra. Testing for these diseases is done through urine analysis or by taking a vaginal culture. If chlamydia infection goes untreated, the disease can spread 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.

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 nodules. In the case of male genital warts, they can be compared to the shape and texture of cauliflower.

Genital warts can appear to one eight months after exposure, but they generally appear within the first two to three months. After treatment, some women may experience recurrences, which means they may have new warts or the warts may be recurring. Even if symptoms are not present, the virus can still be spread to others. This disease may lead to recurring infections, spreading, and causing cancer. A clinical exam or biopsy is used to test for genital warts. Genital warts cannot be cured, but they 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 no cure, but the 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.