

CHAPTER VII: Understanding STIs

Expected Outcomes

Participants will know the symptoms of most STIs.

Which STI Is This!

Objective To identify the symptoms of the most commonly contracted STIs.

Materials 2 sets of cards – one set will have the names of the STIs and the other will have the symptoms of the STIs, transparencies or charts showing the names of the STIs and corresponding symptoms.

Time 1 hour.

Process Based on the number of participants, prepare as many cards as required. It is all right if the cards are repeated.

Ask the participants to sit in a circle. Place the cards with the symptoms of STIs in a box in the center of the circle.

Inform the participants that they will learn about STIs and their corresponding symptoms through this exercise.

Ask each participant to come to the center, pick a card and return to his/her place.

Ask them to read the card and ask questions for clarification if they do not understand what is written.

Now, place the second box in the center of the circle. Inform the group that this box has the cards with the names of various STIs corresponding to the symptoms on the cards they hold.

Empty the contents of this box on the floor, and ask the participants to find the name of the STI they think represents the symptoms on the cards they have.

Allow 30 minutes for this activity.

Ask the participants to return to their seats.

Now, show them the correctly matched cards on a transparency or a flip chart (prepare in advance).

Ask each participant to check their cards to see if they were correct.

Ask all those who made the right connection to gather at one end of the room and all those who did not make the correct connection to gather on the other end of the room.

Ask the correct group to share the reasons for being able to identify the connection.

Then, ask the incorrect group to share the reasons for not being able to make the correct connection.

If nobody succeeds in making a correct match, or if only one or two people succeed in doing so, your task becomes simpler. It proves that it is not easy to diagnose STIs. In fact, it can only be done by a doctor/health practitioner.

Close the session with a summary of the exercise based on the responses of the participants. Emphasize the importance of information in making decisions and the fact that not everyone knows everything. Focus on the issue of sharing and seeking guidance. Point out that the symptoms of various STIs can be confusing and overlap, therefore, it is important to seek the services of a doctor. In fact, STIs can only be diagnosed by a qualified doctor. Also, emphasize that if a person is actually showing physical symptoms, it is a fairly advanced case.

Notes for the Facilitator

This is a simple exercise that provides basic information on STIs and their symptoms. It can be done in a mixed group. It emphasizes the importance of information and the ability to use the information.

Table of commonly contracted STIs and their symptoms

This table should be used to make the cards for the game, and it can also be given as a handout.

Name of the Symptoms	STI
	Syphilis Hard, painless, single, clean, ulcer/lesion on the penis/vaginal area, inside rectum or mouth Persistent fever Sore throat Patches of hair loss Rashes on palms, soles, chest and back (bacterial infection)
	Chancroid Ulcers – painful, multiple, soft Painful swelling of nymph nodes (one side) (bacterial infection)
	Herpes Genitalis Multiple ulcers, shallow erosions, incurable, severe pain, fever, difficulty urinating, tenderness on the inside of the legs (viral infection)

Gonorrhea	Thick yellow discharge from penis/vagina, pain urinating and, or, during sex (bacterial infection)
Chlamydia	Abnormal discharge from the penis/vagina, infertility, bleeding/pain during intercourse, pain while urinating (bacterial infection)
Hepatitis B	Severe infection shows: Loss of appetite, nausea/vomiting, fever, joint pains, jaundice symptoms, dark urine, pain in abdomen (viral infection)
Urethritis	Mild/sever pain while urinating, pus/mucous discharge from penis/vagina (bacterial infection)
Proctitis	Itching/burning around anus, pus/mucous discharge in stool, mild/severe pain during bowel movement, occasional diarrhea or fever (3 out of 10 men show no symptoms) (bacterial infection)
Genital warts	External warts around anus or penis/vagina (viral infection)
Crabs	Lice in the hairy parts of the body, itching (mostly) at night (parasite)
Scabies	Itchy red spots or rash on wrists, ankles, hands, penis/vagina, chest and back (parasite)
HIV	Damages immune system, incurable, leads to AIDS

HELPLINE for the peer educator

This material can also be used to make handouts and posters.

Definition of STI

- S** Sexually
- T** Transmitted/Transmissible
- I** Infection

Initially called STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases), but the term did not include sexually transmitted illnesses that do not exhibit symptoms.

Differ from UTI (Urinary Tract Infection) and RTI (Reproductive Tract Infection), as these infections are not sexually transmitted.

Modes of Transmission of STIs

- STIs spread, if a person has unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected partner. The sexual act can be vaginal, anal or oral.
- STIs require direct contact of mucus membranes or open cuts/sores with infected blood or other body fluids (semen, vaginal secretion)

Some STIs can also be transmitted by

- Sharing of contaminated needles (Syphilis, Hepatitis B/C and HIV)
- Transfusion of infected blood (Syphilis, Hepatitis B/C and HIV)
- Infected mother to child (Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Hepatitis B/C and HIV)

Reasons for Underestimating STIs

- Men and women with STIs may not have symptoms, so they do not seek treatment.
- Clinics that report STI cases may not be easy to reach.
- People with STIs usually initially go to alternative health care providers.

Signs and Symptoms of STIs

General (male and female)

- Burning/pain during urination, increased frequency of urination
- Blisters/sores (ulcers) on the genitals - painful/painless
- Swollen/painful glands in the groin
- Itching in the groin
- Non-itchy rash on the body
- Warts in the genital area
- Sores in the mouth
- Flu like syndrome -fever, body ache, headache

Females

- Unusual vaginal discharge (yellow, frothy, curd-like, pus like, foul smelling, blood tinged)
- Lower abdominal pain
- Irregular bleeding from the genital tract
- Burning/itching around the vagina
- Painful intercourse

Males

- Discharge from the penis

Note: Some STIs do not produce any symptoms, particularly in females. Therefore, they are carriers of the disease.

STIs Can Not Spread By

Using a public latrine, insect bites, sins of past life, masturbation, eating "hot" food, bad blood or working in a hot atmosphere.

STIs Can Not Be Cured By

Eating certain types of food, application of certain oils, having sex with a virgin girl /boy.

Complications of Untreated STIs

- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) -swelling of uterus, tubes, ovaries causing abdominal pain, vaginal discharge and fever.
- Infertility (male and female).
- Ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy developing outside uterus).
- Abortion, stillbirth, early childhood deaths.
- Eye infection of newborn -blindness (gonorrhea).
- Birth defects.
- Cancer of cervix.
- Chronic abdominal pain.
- Death due to sepsis, ectopic pregnancy or cervical cancer

Relationship between STIs and HIV

- Transmitted by the same route.
- STI increases the chances of transmission of HIV (10x genital ulcers, 5x discharge).
- Same modes of prevention and same target group.
- STI may be more severe and more resistant to treatment in HIV patients.
- STI prevention is one of the main strategies to prevent HIV / AIDS.

Increased risk of HIV infection associated with common STIs and their curability.

Name of STI	Increased risk of HIV	Curability
Gonorrhea (Genital discharge disease)	++ >	95 per cent
Chlamydia (Genital discharge disease)	++ >	95 per cent
Syphilis (Genital ulcer disease)	++ >	95 per cent
Chancroid (Genital ulcer disease)	+++ >	95 per cent
Trichomoniasis (Urethral / Vaginal discharge disease)	+ >	95 per cent

Common STIs

(a) Genital Ulcer Diseases

1. Syphilis
2. Chancroid
3. Lymphogranuloma Venereum (LGV)
4. Granuloma Inguinale (Donovanosis)
5. Herpes Genitalis

(b) Genital Discharge Diseases

1. Gonorrhea
2. Non-Gonococcal Urethritis
3. Candidiasis
4. Trichomoniasis
5. Bacterial Vaginosis

(c) Other Diseases

Genital Molluscum
Contagiosum Scabies
Hepatitis B and C HIV/AIDS

Syndromic Management of STIs

- Identification of consistent group of symptoms and easily recognizable signs (syndromes)
- Treatment of main organisms responsible for causing the syndrome

The common syndromes include

- (a) Urethral discharge
- (b) Genital ulcer disease
- (c) Vaginal discharge
- (d) Lower abdominal pain
- (e) Ophthalmia neonatorum
- (f) Inguinal bubo
- (g) Swollen scrotum

Main features of STI management include

- (a) Grouping the main infectious agents according to the clinical syndromes they cause.
- (b) Using flow charts as tools.
- (c) Treating patients for all important causes of a syndrome.
- (d) Educating patients, promoting condom use and emphasizing the importance of partner referral.