

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

In the days before antibiotics, most “treatments” of syphilis did more harm than good. For hundreds of years, mercury was applied topically, inhaled and even drank as a remedy.

Q. Which STDs are curable?

A. To understand which sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are curable, we first need to look at their pathogenic, disease-causing origins. The most common STDs are viruses, bacteria, parasites and protozoa. Among these, bacterial and protozoan STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and trichomoniasis are readily curable, and have been since the development of antibiotics. In fact, one of the first antibiotics to be developed was *Salvarsan*, an early treatment for syphilis that also gave us the term “magic bullet” based on its effectiveness.

Because antibiotics have no effect on viruses, however, herpes, genital warts (HPV) and HIV have been more problematic, despite huge leaps in modern medicine. Some types of HPV can be prevented in women through vaccination (Gardasil®), herpes and HIV can both be “managed” through a variety of drugs, and molluscum contagiosum (and some strains of HPV) can be treated by freezing off infected bumps, but at present none of these viral STDs can be cured outright. Many individuals will have no visible signs or symptoms of viral STDs, which can delay treatment in some cases (HIV) and make it unnecessary in others (HPV, genital herpes). As for pubic lice (also known as “crabs”) and scabies, creams or lotions containing permethrin are the standard, first-line treatments that are effective at removing these parasites.

Even better than curing STDs is preventing them in the first place. Protect yourself and your partner by talking about STDs before you have sex, getting tested and protecting yourself through the consistent and correct use of condoms. Keep in mind that even sex with a condom is not risk-free. Only through abstinence or mutually monogamous sex with an uninfected partner can you lower your risk to around zero.

Confidential STD testing and treatment are available at the Campus Health Service. Call 621-9202 to schedule an appointment or stop by the Highland Commons building near 6th St. and Highland Ave. For more information on STDs, check out www.health.arizona.edu, or spend five minutes at www.stdwizard.org to find out if you should be tested.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu



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