

A STD primer

Symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases not always apparent

By Douglas Engh
Staff Reporter

"Chlamydia is not a flower," says a brochure distributed by the University Health Center, but rather the most common sexually transmitted disease (STD) among UNL students. Like many other STDs, if left undiagnosed and untreated, chlamydia can have devastating effects, such as sterility, blindness, or even Reiter's syndrome, an arthritis-like condition.

A recent pilot research test taken by the University Health Center revealed that 15 to 25 percent of the men and women at the university carry the disease. It's estimated that 60 to 80 percent of women, and 10 percent of men show no symptoms, such as painful urination, watery discharge, itching and burning, and for women, bleeding between menstrual periods.

But chlamydia isn't the only STD to be watched for:

Genital Warts, the second most prevalent STD, causes painless cauliflower-like warts to appear around the sex organs, as the name implies. Also called venereal warts, they can be treated by freezing or by topical medication.

Genital Herpes is now considered epidemic nationwide and comes in two types. Both Herpes Simplex One and Two, are similar and can cause fever blisters or cold sores around the mouth or genitals. The victim may then experience flu-like symptoms that can last for up to three weeks. After which, the virus lies dormant with occasional outbreaks of symptoms.

Gonorrhea can cause discharge and urinary burning among males, while having no symptoms among the majority of women. Even so, it can lead to pelvic inflammations and severe complications, like sterility, if left untreated by antibiotics.

Syphilis first shows up as painless sores, called chancres, around the sex organs, mouth or skin up to 90 days after exposure. Following symptoms include rash, loss of hair, and swollen glands. These symptoms all clear by themselves after several weeks, leaving the disease difficult to visibly diagnose. In later years, victims can suffer crippling, blindness, insanity, and deterioration of bones. One quarter of syphilis victims eventually die.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the most talked about STD in the past years. Its virus can be found in the body fluids: blood, semen and saliva, of those infected. It can be transmitted by contaminated blood transfusions or sexual contact. As of yet, evidence does not prove it can be transmitted by perspiration, saliva, or tears.

AIDS leaves the body vulnerable to a variety of other diseases. Since it shows no initial symptoms, the only way for detection is by a blood test. Although homosexuals were once thought to be the only high risk group for contracting AIDS, the virus has been found increasingly among heterosexuals and IV drug users who share needles.

The stigma of STDs and the privacy of victims and potential victims creates a great dilemma for those health workers involved. But the sensitive subject of prevention and education must be dealt with, said Dr. Gerald Fleischli, medical director of the University

Health Center. He said the STD's are of special concern to college adults.

"The reason we're so concerned is that this age group is one in development, and one of the developmental activities is sexual activity," he said.

"A lot of sexual activity occurs unplanned. People tend not to think or plan ahead on getting the disease," he said. "Use of drugs, alcohol, peer pressure — things happen and the disease is transmitted."

But Fleischli doesn't think the solution is simple. He said that efforts in STD prevention are inherently ambivalent.

"There's no problem in STD if you

abstain (from sex). But, every parent needs to realize it's an unrealistic ideal, so a backup is needed," he said.

His backup is a system of prevention and treatment programs, Fleischli said. The Health Center offers small group presentations. Any campus group, such as dormitory floors, fraternities, or sororities, can arrange for a special STD counselor to come and give a presentation. This program, Fleischli said, has really developed during the past 18 months.

Other presentations come on a larger scale. Last year, Dr. Richard Keeling, a nationally-recognized authority on STDs, gave a talk on campus. Talks

provide students with better national information, said Dr. Fleischli.

Another form of education is a booklet produced by the Health Center entitled "The Body Works." A student health guide, it is mass mailed to all new freshmen and transfer students. It includes a variety of health and safety tips, along with descriptions of the major STDs, diagnoses and treatments. The Health Center also puts out a semester newsletter sent to all students, faculty and staff which outlines new health information.

Students who suspect they may have a sexually-transmitted disease may go to the Health Center for testing. A

Human Immunal Virus (HIV) test for AIDS is given along with the other tests for no additional charge. However, only one STD can be tested for at a time, and each test is individually charged.

If a person has tested positive, treatment is available along with extensive counseling. Special admissions nurses have been trained in both the testing and counseling of HIV tests. Since these nurses are also a part of the normal admissions system, extensive testing schedules can strain the admissions system, said Dr. Fleischli. If students come to the Health Center at certain times for other health reasons,

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