



Mythbusters: The Reality of STDs

By: Maj. David Nee, Preventive Medicine

April is Sexually Transmitted Diseases Awareness Month. These diseases affect men and women of all backgrounds and economic levels. Despite effective tools such as antibiotics, male and female condoms, testing, and vaccinations, the Centers for Disease Control estimates that 19 million new infections occur each year. Almost half of those are people from 15 to 24 years old.

Knowledge can help reverse that trend. Separating fact from fiction can help you can change your behavior in a way that keeps you safe.

Myth #1 – “My partner and I feel healthy. Nothing looks like any of those scary pictures in STD slides.”

Reality – Many people with STDs have no symptoms. Half of men and three-quarters of women with chlamydia don't have symptoms. This is why testing, treating, and educating all involved parties is crucial.

Myth #2 – “We are in the Army so none of us have HIV.”

Reality – Although HIV-positive Soldiers are restricted from some assignments and units, AR 600-110 allows Soldiers to remain in the Army until they develop another condition that makes them unfit for duty. Most HIV-positive Soldiers do not even have medical profiles.

Myth #3 – “If I am treated for a sexually transmitted disease, my commander and everyone else will know.”

Reality #3 - Unless there is a reason to believe it will affect a Soldier's ability to perform his or her duties, Army medical professionals handle your information with the same discretion as if you saw a physician downtown.

Myth #4 – I just got my annual Pap exam. The doctor didn't say anything was wrong.”

Reality – This exam is primarily a test for cervical cancer. The health care provider will typically test for chlamydia and gonorrhea. Tests for other sexually transmitted infections are not usually performed.

Myth #5 – “I got checked and all my tests came back normal.”

Reality - Tests have limitations. Sexual partner history is essential. Our medical examinations and testing alone will not allow us to declare, “All Clear!” accurately.

Myth #6 - “I use birth control pills. I don't have to worry.”

Reality – Non-barrier birth control methods do not protect from STDs. Condoms, when used consistently and appropriately, provide protection from some diseases but are often not effective in preventing others.



Myth #7 - "Can't you cure everything I can get?!?"

Reality – There are cures for some STDs, but a person can get re-infected. Other STDs can be for life. It's estimated that 65 million people in the U.S. live with an incurable STD.

Myth #8- "If I look at someone's genitals, I can tell if they are infected."

Reality – Even doctors that see patients with STDs every day cannot reliably tell if someone is infected without performing lab tests. If a person has an STD but no symptoms, they will still be able to spread infection to you.

Myth #9- "If I have oral sex, I can't become infected."

Reality – Although oral sex is less risky, most infections can be transmitted through oral sex.

Myth #10- "Only people who have lots of sexual partners are infected."

Reality – Many people have no symptoms and can be infected for years without knowing it. It only takes one time for you to become infected, too.

Getting a medical exam and tests is a smart way to identify some common STDs. Get yourself tested through your health care provider.

For more information on how to protect yourself and others, see www.cdc.gov/std or contact Preventive Medicine at 526-2939 to arrange training or clinical screening.