STDs & Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM)

Why focus on men who have sex with men (MSM)?
MSM have disproportionately higher rates of sexually transmitted disease than the general population: 1
- In 2015 MSM accounted for 81% of all syphilis cases. 2
- MSM with gonorrhea represent a growing population treated in STD clinics across the country. 3

About MSM in Indiana (2015)
- Total of 947 infections among 759 people were reported.
- 154 people had more than one infection in one year
  - Many individuals became re-infected with another STD within the same year.
- Most infections were located in the Indianapolis metropolitan area (439, or 57.8% of, reported infections).
- Nearly 50% of persons were HIV positive.
  - 97 (12.8%) were newly diagnosed
  - 47.3% use online apps to find a partner.
  - 36.5% report drug and/or alcohol use.
- Approximately 5 sexual partners were reported on average.
- Gonorrhea was the most reported disease (35.0% of infections) followed by Secondary and Early Latent Syphilis (18.6% of infections each).
- Number of sex partners, drug use and sexual position are risks associated with STD contraction.

Figure 1: Disease Burden Among MSM in Indiana, 2015 (n=759)

Commonly reported sexually transmitted diseases

**Chlamydia**
Second most commonly reported sexually transmitted disease in Indiana among MSM. 4 Caused by a bacteria when exposure is made through unprotected sexual contact (ejaculation does not have to occur). Infection occurs in the penis, anus and throat. 5

**Signs and symptoms**
Most people do not have symptoms, but those who do will experience:
- Rectal pain, discharge or bleeding
- Burning with urination
- Watery discharge from the penis
- Pain in one of the testicles

**Treatment**
Single dose of Azithromycin or Doxycycline twice a day for 7 days

**Gonorrhea**
Most commonly reported sexually transmitted disease in Indiana among MSM. Transmitted through unprotected oral and anal sex. 5

**Signs and symptoms**
Some people will not have symptoms. Those who do will experience:
- Penile or rectal drainage
- Difficulty or pain urinating

Untreated infections can cause infertility and may spread to the bloodstream resulting in a life-threatening condition that causes arthritis, dermatitis and inflammation of the sheath around the tendons. 5

**Treatment**
Single dose of Ceftriaxone and Azithromycin 5

**Syphilis**
Transmitted when direct contact is made with a syphilis sore. 6
Infection occurs in stages and can last decades depending on the stage. 6

**Signs and symptoms**

**Primary**
- Chancre (round painless sore), often found on the penis or anus, in the rectum, on the lips or in the mouth

**Secondary**
- Skin rash on hands or feet
- Sores in mouth or anus
- Fever, sore throat, fatigue, headache or hair loss

**Early latent**
- No symptoms

**Late latent**
- Damage to bones; joints; blood vessels; and organs including brain, heart and eyes. 6

**Treatment**
Benzathine penicillin, dose dependent on stage

For additional information about health issues affecting MSM, please visit https://www.cdc.gov/msmhealth/index.htm
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Recommended testing
- Annually for ALL MSM, regardless of condom use.
- Every 3 – 6 months for those at increased risk, including persons who:
  - Are HIV positive
  - Have multiple sex partners
  - Live in a high prevalence setting, such as a correctional facility
  - Have a partner who tested positive for an STD

Why are MSM at higher risk?
- Anal sex. Rectal mucosa is highly susceptible to certain pathogens.
- Socioeconomic factors such as substance abuse, dynamics of sexual networks, and multiple partners increase risk of infection and transmission.
- Stigma and discrimination surrounding the MSM lifestyle negatively affects the health of MSM who may not seek testing or treatment.

Concerns and complications
Gonorrhea
New, but rare, strains of gonorrhea are resistant to all types of antibiotics. If totally resistant strains reach the epidemic level, there will be no way to cure the disease.

Neurosyphilis
Can happen at any stage of the infection. It is characterized when the infection moves to the brain and spinal cord and can cause a variety of symptoms from blindness and seizures to stroke or death. The neurological impairment is irreversible.

Ocular Syphilis
Can occur at any point in a syphilis infection and can affect any part of the eye. Symptoms involve changes in vision and clarity of vision, and blindness. Some blindness is irreversible.

HIV and STDs: When a break in the skin is present, such as a chancre caused by syphilis, the risk of HIV transmission is three to five times more likely. Gonorrhea can act as a carrier for HIV, increasing the risk of transmission. Nationally, in 2015 nearly half of MSM with primary or secondary syphilis were co-infected with HIV.

Expediting partner therapy
Practitioners in Indiana can prescribe antibiotics to exposed sex partners who cannot seek treatment. Prescriptions are given to the infected person to pass on to the partner.

Fast facts
- MSM are at higher risk for STDs and are less likely to seek testing and treatment due to stigma.
- Damage to the body from untreated gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis is irreversible.
- Patients should take ALL of their antibiotics for the entire duration to fully treat the infection.

References

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