

When Is a Skin Rash More Than Just a Rash? Sexually Transmitted Diseases: A Dermatological Perspective

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Athletic trainers and therapists assume many roles as health-care providers. Most common problems presented by athletes are troubles ranging from soft-tissue to orthopedic injuries. Soft-tissue injuries in close proximity to the genitalia or buttocks present special consideration during the evaluation process. Assessment of this area and the skin surface over and near the trauma site should be examined for abrasions, open wounds, and lacerations. At this time, the athletic trainer or therapist might discover a preexisting scar or a skin condition such as a rash, boil, blister, or ulcer of unknown origin. Other times, an athlete will introduce himself or herself to the athletic trainer or therapist

with an unexplained skin condition of the genitalia or anal region. Proper evaluation of unexplained skin conditions should include a history of past sexual activity because of a possibly undiscovered sexually transmitted disease (STD). This article addresses the most common STDs that exhibit visible dermatological conditions, thus allowing early recognition and a swift referral for medical treatment.

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Sexually Transmitted Diseases—Reason for Concern

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) have been common medical ailments throughout history (American Social Health Association [ASHA], 2001; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2001; New Media Systems, LLC, 2001). According to statistics from the ASHA, one in five people in the United States has an STD, along with an estimated 250 million worldwide (see the sidebar for other STD statistics). In addition, the *Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior* (2001) indicates that STDs infect approximately 12 million individuals each year. Two thirds of all STDs occur in men and women under the age of 25 (CDC, 2001; Institute of Medicine, 1997). Chlamydia and gonorrhea are the most common STDs in young people (Clark, 1997; Institute of Medicine). The rate of chlamydia is highest among women age 15–19 and higher among Black and Hispanic women than White women (Institute of Medicine). The rate of gonorrhea infections among Blacks and women age 15–19 is high, as well (Institute of Medicine). In the United States, 1 million new cases of genital herpes occur each year, adding to the estimated 45 million who are already infected (Fleming et al., 1997).

Key Points

- ▶ One in five people has a sexually transmitted disease (STD).
- ▶ An unexplained ulcer, rash, or sore on the genitalia should always be suspect of an STD.
- ▶ Evaluation of any skin condition around the genitalia should include medical-history questions of past sexual activity.
- ▶ Many STDs go untreated because athletes fail to report signs or symptoms.
- ▶ Key Words: STDs, genital warts, herpes, syphilis, chancroid, chancre sore, crabs

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STD Statistics (American Social Health Association, 2001)

One in five people in the United States has a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

Two thirds of all STDs occur in people 25 years of age or younger.

One in four new STD infections occurs in teenagers.

Cervical cancer in women is linked to human papillomavirus (HPV), which causes genital warts.

Hepatitis B is 100 times more infectious than HIV.

STDs other than HIV cost about \$8 billion each year to diagnose and treat.

One in five Americans has genital herpes, but 90% of them are unaware of it.

At least one in four Americans will contract an STD at some point in their lives.

HPV is the most common STD in the United States.

More than 5 million people are infected with HPV each year.

Less than half of adults age 18–44 have ever been tested for an STD other than HIV/AIDS.

At least 15% of all infertile American women are infertile because of tubal damage caused by pelvic inflammatory disease resulting from an untreated STD.

Two thirds of hepatitis B (HBV) infections are transmitted sexually. HBV is linked to chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis and cancer.

Table 1. Types of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

STD	Description
Chancroid	A treatable bacterial infection that causes painful sores.
Chlamydia	A treatable bacterial infection that can scar the fallopian tubes, affecting a woman's ability to have children.
Genital herpes	A recurrent skin condition that can cause skin irritations in the genital region (anus, vagina, penis).
Genital warts	A condition caused by human papillomavirus (HPV).
Gonorrhea	A treatable bacterial infection of the penis, vagina, or anus that causes pain or a burning feeling, as well as a puslike discharge. Also known as the clap.
Hepatitis	A disease that affects the liver. There are more than four types; Hepatitis A and B are the most common.
HIV/AIDS	HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system, resulting in acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS.
HPV	A virus that affects the skin in the genital area, as well as the cervix in women. Depending on the type of HPV involved, symptoms can be in the form of wartlike growths or abnormal cell changes.
<i>Molluscum contagiosum</i>	A skin disease that is caused by a virus, usually resulting in lesions or bumps.
Nongonococcal urethritis (NGU)	A treatable bacterial infection of the urethra (the tube within the penis) oftentimes associated with chlamydia.
Pelvic inflammatory disease	An infection of the female reproductive organs by chlamydia, gonorrhea, or other bacteria. Also known as PID.
Pubic lice, or crabs	Also known as pediculosis pubis. Parasites or bugs that live on the pubic hair in the genital area.
Scabies	A treatable skin disease that is caused by a parasite.
Syphilis	A treatable bacterial infection that can spread throughout the body and affect the heart, brain, and nerves. Also known as syph.
Vaginitis	Caused by different germs including yeast and trichomoniasis, vaginitis is an infection of the vagina resulting in itching, burning, vaginal discharge, and an odd odor.

Note. Adapted from American Social Health Association, 2001.