

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: STI's/HIV

Last time we focused on one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) -- gonorrhoea.

We talked about some of the behaviours that put young people at risk of contracting gonorrhoea and the dangers of this disease.

This time we will look at the link between sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, and how having STD's may increase the risk of HIV transmission.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), apart from being dangerous diseases in their own right, sexually transmitted infections increase the risk of contracting or transmitting HIV infection.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To educate listeners about the increased risk of HIV when one has STI's
- To discuss how STI's can increase HIV vulnerability
- To give participating journalists story ideas on STI's/HIV
- To find out from DHO's on what they are doing to increase awareness on the dangers of STI's

The Problem: STI's Increase the Risk of HIV Infection

Anyone who is sexually active risks exposure to a sexually transmitted infection including HIV.

According to WHO, more than one million people around the world acquire a sexually transmitted infection (STI) every day.

It further notes that some STIs can increase the risk of contracting HIV by three-fold.

In the case of people with HIV, having an STI increases the amount of the virus in one's sample of blood – as well as their genital secretions. This makes them more infectious – even if they are taking an anti-retroviral drug. For example, if a person is HIV-positive and

also infected with gonorrhea, they will have up to ten times the amount of HIV in their blood – than if they are only infected with HIV.

This means they would be much more likely to transmit HIV to their sexual partner.

Alternatively, someone who is HIV-negative who has gonorrhea may be five times more vulnerable to HIV than someone who is not infected with gonorrhea.

STI's can cause inflammation, which is triggered by the immune system. Since HIV prefers to infect immune cells, any disease that causes an increase in these cells also will make it easier for a person to become infected with HIV.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help young people from your community understand how having sexually transmitted diseases may increase their risk of contracting HIV.

Present the following information to listeners:

STDs can increase HIV susceptibility in a number of ways:

Some STDs, such as syphilis, cause open wounds or ulcers to form in the genital area. These wounds, sometimes seen and sometimes not, provide HIV a direct route into the blood stream.

While some STDs don't cause open wounds, the presence of the infection can cause the body to increase the concentration of CD4 T-cells in the genital area. These are white blood cells that play a major role in protecting your body from infection.

It has been well established that increased concentrations of these cells can provide HIV with an easy path into the body.

People infected with an STD may have increased concentrations of HIV in their seminal and vaginal fluids, increasing the possibility of HIV transmission.

To avoid situations like these, young people are advised to abstain from sex or use a condom whenever they have intercourse or better still go for an STI/HIV test so they can know their status and that of their partners.

Do a vox pop with young people from your area and ask if they worry about getting an STI or HIV? Do they use any sort of protection when having sex?

Talk to your District Health Officer (DHO) and get the statistics of sexually transmitted diseases recorded in the district for the past two years. Ask the DHO what he/she is doing to make sure young people are aware of the dangers of STI's.

Does your local clinic provide free condoms and advice about STI's?

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