

Let's Talk About STDs!

Sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs, are very common. Often there are no symptoms, at least not at first. Left untreated, STDs can cause serious health issues, including infertility, pain, and even death, in some cases. Also, having one STD can increase the risk of getting another.

The good news is all STDs, including HIV, are treatable, and many are curable.

While routine testing for many STDs is recommended, that does not mean it always happens as part of a regular checkup or gynecologist exam. **To know for sure, ask to be tested.**

Read on for more about specific STDs, including symptoms, testing and treatment.

A healthcare provider can advise on which STDs you should be tested for and how often. If you don't have a regular provider, free or low cost STD testing is available in most areas.



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WEAIDS

Chlamydia

- A bacterial infection
- Often doesn't have symptoms
- Cured with antibiotics
- Estimated 1.7 million new cases in the U.S. each year

Gonorrhea

- A bacterial infection
- Often doesn't have symptoms
- Cured with antibiotics
- Estimated 580,000 new cases in the U.S. each year

Hepatitis B

- A viral infection affecting the liver
- Often doesn't have symptoms
- No cure, but treatable with prescription medication. Vaccine available
- Estimated 21,600 new cases in the U.S. each year

Hepatitis C

- A viral infection affecting the liver
- Often doesn't have symptoms
- Cured with prescription medication. Left untreated can cause liver disease and death
- Estimated 2.4 million people living with hepatitis C in the U.S.

Herpes

- A virus affecting the mouth and/or genitals.
- Can cause blistery sores
- No cure, but can be managed with prescription medication
- Estimated 1 in 6 people ages 14-49 has genital herpes in the U.S.

HIV/AIDS

- A virus that attacks the immune system
- May not show symptoms initially
- No cure, but treatable with antiretroviral prescription medications
- Estimated 1.2 million people living with HIV in the U.S.

HPV

- A virus with 150 different types
- Some types cause genital warts; others, often do not have symptoms
- Vaccine protects against some types

Syphilis

- A bacterial infection
- Symptoms can come and go
- Cured with antibiotics
- Left untreated can cause permanent damage.
- Estimated 35,000 new cases in the U.S. each year

Trichomoniasis

- A parasitic infection
- Usually no symptoms, but can cause vaginitis that may result in discharge and irritation
- Cured with antibiotics
- Estimated 3.7 million people living with trich in U.S.

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Chlamydia

Chlamydia is one of the most common STDs. There are an estimated 1.7 million new cases a year in the U.S. Many people who have chlamydia do not know it. Often there are no symptoms. Left untreated, chlamydia can cause infertility and pain in both women and men. Once diagnosed, it is easily cured with antibiotics.

How do you get chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a bacterial infection usually transmitted during vaginal, anal or oral sex through semen (cum), pre-cum, and vaginal fluids. It can infect the penis, vagina, cervix, anus, urethra, eyes, and throat.

Chlamydia can also be passed during birth to a baby if the mother is infected and not treated.

When used consistently and correctly, condoms protect against chlamydia and many other STDs.

What are the symptoms of chlamydia?

Like most STDs, chlamydia often does not show any symptoms. As a result, many people with chlamydia do not know it. The only way to know is to get tested.

If symptoms do appear, they may include pain or burning while peeing and/or during sex, lower belly pain, swollen or tender testicles, or abnormal discharge from vagina, penis or anus.

What's involved in chlamydia testing?

There are different tests for chlamydia. It can be as simple and easy as peeing in a cup. Some health providers might use a genital swab (like a big Q-tip) to take cell samples from the urethra, vagina, cervix, or anus. The samples are tested for chlamydia bacteria.

How do you treat chlamydia?

Chlamydia can be easily cured with antibiotics prescribed by a healthcare provider.

It is important to complete the full treatment, as prescribed by your healthcare provider, even if symptoms go away sooner. The infection stays in your body until you finish the antibiotics. Also, do not share your medicine with anyone or take someone else's.

Some healthcare providers may give a separate dose of antibiotics for your partner(s) so you do not re-infect each other or anyone else. Do not have sex until you have finished treatment.

Get tested again in 3-4 months to make sure the infection is gone and you were not re-exposed.

What happens if chlamydia is not treated?

Untreated chlamydia can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in women. Women with PID may not realize they have it, but left untreated it can cause pain, infertility or ectopic pregnancy.

Pregnant women with untreated chlamydia can pass it to their babies during childbirth. It can cause eye infections and pneumonia in newborns, and also increase the risk of delivering your baby too early.

In men, chlamydia can spread to the epididymis (a tube that carries sperm from the testicles), and can cause chronic joint pain and infertility for some.

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Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is a common STD, especially among teens and people in their 20s. Sometimes called “the clap” or “the drip.” Gonorrhea may not show symptoms. Left untreated, it can cause infertility and pain in both women and men. Once diagnosed, it is easily cured with antibiotics.

How do you get gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a bacterial infection usually transmitted during vaginal, anal or oral sex. It is spread when semen (cum), pre-cum, or vaginal fluids get on or inside the genitals, anus or mouth. Gonorrhea can be passed even if the penis does not go all the way in the vagina or anus.

Gonorrhea can also be passed to a baby during birth if the mother is infected and not treated.

When used consistently and correctly, condoms protect against gonorrhea and many other STDs.

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Like most STDs, gonorrhea often does not show any symptoms, or the signs may be so mild you don't even notice them. The only way to know is to get tested.

When symptoms do appear, it is usually within a week of infection and may include: pain or burning when peeing, abnormal discharge from the vagina or penis, and pain or swelling in the testicles.

Gonorrhea can also infect the anus if you have anal sex, or may spread to the anus from another part of the body (like by wiping after using the bathroom). Anal gonorrhea often does not have any symptoms but signs can include itching in or around the anus, discharge from the anus, or pain when pooping.

What's involved in gonorrhea testing?

There are different tests for gonorrhea. It can be as simple and easy as peeing in a cup. Some healthcare providers might use a swab (like a big Q-tip) to take cell samples from the penis, cervix, urethra, anus or throat. The samples are tested for gonorrhea bacteria.

How do you treat gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea can be easily cured with antibiotics prescribed by a healthcare provider.

It is important to complete the full treatment, as prescribed by your healthcare provider, even if symptoms go away sooner. The infection stays in your body until you finish the antibiotics. Also, do not share your medicine with anyone or take someone else's.

Some healthcare providers may give a separate dose of antibiotics for your partner(s) so you do not re-infect each other or anyone else. Do not have sex until you have finished treatment.

Get tested again in 3-4 months to make sure the infection is gone and you were not re-exposed.

What happens if gonorrhea is not treated?

Untreated gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) in women. Women with PID may not realize they have it, but left untreated it can cause pain, infertility or ectopic pregnancy.

Pregnant women with untreated gonorrhea can pass it to their babies during childbirth. It can cause blindness, joint infections, or blood infections in newborns, which can be deadly.

In men, untreated gonorrhea can spread to the epididymis (a tube that carries sperm from the testicles), and can cause pain in the testicles. Rarely, it can cause infertility.

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Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that can cause liver disease. About half of people with hepatitis B do not experience any symptoms. There is no cure, but a vaccine is available to protect against infection.

How do you get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is transmitted through semen (cum), vaginal fluids, blood, and urine during sex – vaginal, anal or oral – or through needles, razors, or toothbrushes with blood on them.

Hepatitis B can also be passed to babies during birth if their mother has it and is not treated.

When used consistently and correctly, condoms protect against hepatitis B and many other STDs.

What is the hepatitis B vaccine?

A vaccine to protect against infection is available for hepatitis B. It requires a series of shots provided by a healthcare provider over several months. You need the full series for it to be effective.

Most babies now get the hepatitis B vaccine from their doctor as a regular part of their checkups.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

About half of adults with hepatitis B do not experience any symptoms. If people do have symptoms, they may go unnoticed or look like other common illnesses, like the flu. Hepatitis B symptoms typically last for a few weeks, but can sometimes last for months.

If symptoms do appear, they may include: stomach pain, nausea and vomiting, joint pain, fever, dark-colored urine, or hives. Because hepatitis B affects the liver, it may also cause jaundice — when the eyes and skin yellow.

What's involved in hepatitis B testing?

Hepatitis B is tested with a blood sample. It may take up to two months after infection before a positive result.

How do you treat hepatitis B?

If you have chronic hepatitis B, there are prescription medications that can help keep your liver healthy. Check with a healthcare provider before taking any over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, or nutritional supplements to make sure they won't further hurt your liver.

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Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a viral infection that affects the liver. An estimated 2.4 million people are living with hepatitis C in the U.S. Most people do not experience any symptoms. Hepatitis C is cured with prescription medication. Left untreated, it can lead to liver disease, cancer and even death.

How do you get hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus. Today, hepatitis C is most often transmitted by sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs. If you inject drugs, always use new, sterile needles and don't reuse or share needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment.

Hepatitis C can also be transmitted during sex. When used consistently and correctly, condoms protect against hepatitis C and many other STDs.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Most people with hepatitis C do not experience any symptoms. If people do have symptoms, they may go unnoticed or look like other common illnesses, like the flu.

If symptoms do appear, they usually occur 6-12 weeks after infection and may include: stomach pain, nausea and vomiting, joint pain, fever, or dark-colored urine. Because hepatitis C affects the liver, it may also cause jaundice - when the eyes and skin yellow.

What's involved in hepatitis C testing?

Hepatitis C is tested with a blood sample.

How do you treat hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C can be a short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic) disease. Acute hepatitis C is typically monitored but not treated, and may go away on its own without treatment. According to the CDC, almost 85% of people with hepatitis C will develop chronic infection.

There are several medications available to treat chronic hepatitis C. New safe and effective treatments can cure most people living with the virus.

What happens if hepatitis C is not treated?

Left untreated, chronic hepatitis C can lead to liver cancer, liver cirrhosis and even death.

How are hepatitis C and HIV connected?

People living with HIV are at higher risk for hepatitis C. Of the 1.1 million people living with HIV in the U.S., about 1 in 4 also have hepatitis C.

Having both HIV and hepatitis C (called co-infection) means increased risk for liver disease, liver failure and liver-related death from hepatitis C. Because hepatitis is often serious in people living with HIV and may lead to liver damage more quickly, the CDC recommends people living with or at risk for HIV also get tested for hepatitis C.

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Herpes

Herpes is a very common STD. It can cause sores on the genitals and/or mouth. An estimated 1 in 6 people ages 14-49 in the U.S. has genital herpes. There is no cure for herpes, but prescription medication can ease symptoms and lower the chances of passing the virus to others. Herpes can be painful, but usually does not lead to serious health problems.

How do you get herpes?

There are two different herpes viruses: Herpes Simplex Virus type 1 (HSV-1) and Herpes Simplex Virus type 2 (HSV-2).

Herpes is transmitted from skin-to-skin contact when your genitals and/or mouth touch the genitals and/or mouth — usually during oral, anal or vaginal sex — of someone with the virus. Herpes can be passed even if the penis or tongue does not go all the way in the vagina, anus, or mouth.

While rare, a mother can pass genital herpes to the baby during vaginal childbirth.

Herpes is most easily transmitted when sores are open and wet, because fluid from herpes blisters easily spreads the virus. But herpes can also “shed” and be passed to others when there are no sores and the skin looks totally normal. Most people get herpes from someone who do not have any sores.

When used consistently and correctly, condoms protect against herpes and many other STDs.

What are the symptoms of herpes?

The most common symptom of genital herpes is outbreaks of itchy, painful blisters or sores on the vagina, vulva, cervix, penis, butt, anus, or inside of the thighs.

The first outbreak usually starts about 2 to 20 days after exposure to herpes, but sometimes it takes years for the first outbreak to happen. It usually lasts about 2 to 4 weeks. Even though the blisters go away, the virus stays in the body and can cause sores again. It is common to get repeat outbreaks, especially during the first year of having herpes.

The first outbreak is usually the worst. Repeat outbreaks are usually shorter and less painful. Most people with herpes get fewer outbreaks as time goes on, and some stop having them altogether.

Other symptoms may include itching, pain around the genitals or having trouble peeing. If genital herpes is caused by HSV-2, there may also be flu-like symptoms, such as swollen glands, fever, chills and aches.

Usually, oral herpes is less painful than genital herpes and doesn't make you feel as sick. Oral herpes causes sores on the lips or around the mouth — called cold sores or fever blisters.

Cold sores last a few weeks and then go away on their own. They can re-appear in weeks, months, or years. Cold sores are usually harmless in kids and adults, but can be dangerous to newborn babies.

What's involved in herpes testing?

If there are blisters or sores, a healthcare provider may gently swab the area to take a fluid sample and test it. If there are no sores, but you are concerned you may have been exposed, a blood test may be done. Herpes tests are not normally recommended unless you have symptoms.

How do you treat herpes?

There's no cure, but prescription medications can ease symptoms, end outbreaks sooner, and lower the chances of passing the virus to other people.

You can also help ease the pain caused by herpes outbreaks by taking a warm bath, wearing loose clothing and putting an ice pack on the sores.

What happens if herpes is not treated?

Herpes can be painful, but it generally does not cause serious health problems like other STDs can.

Without treatment, you might continue to have regular outbreaks, or they could only happen rarely. Some people naturally stop getting outbreaks after a while. Herpes typically does not get worse over time.

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HIV/AIDS

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system and can lead to AIDS, a clinical diagnosis that indicates an advanced stage of HIV. HIV may not show symptoms initially. Testing is recommended as a part of routine healthcare.

There is no cure for HIV/AIDS, but antiretroviral (ARV) prescription medications allow people with HIV to live normal, healthy lifespans. Consistent ARV use also prevents transmission to others. Left untreated, HIV can lead to death.

How do you get HIV?

The most common way people get HIV is through unprotected anal or vaginal sex with someone with HIV who is not aware of their status or not on consistent antiretroviral treatment. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), HIV transmission through oral sex is extremely rare. You cannot get HIV through closed-mouth or "social" kissing or saliva.

Sharing used needles, syringes, or other drug preparation equipment increases the risk of getting HIV.

HIV can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy, birth and through breastfeeding, although this risk can be almost eliminated with treatment.

HIV is not spread through sharing glasses or plates, food, holding hands, toilet seats, or other casual contact.

When used consistently and correctly, condoms protect against HIV and many other STDs. Another

option is PrEP – pre-exposure prophylaxis – a once-a-day pill for people who do not have HIV and want added protection. It is available only by prescription and is highly effective in protecting against getting HIV. PrEP does not protect against other STDs.

PEP – post-exposure prophylaxis – is a prescription medication that can be taken within 72 hours after potential exposure to prevent HIV. It is for emergency use only, and not intended for regular, ongoing use. If you are prescribed PEP you will need to take it once or twice daily for 28 days. Contact your healthcare provider or emergency room for a prescription.

What are the symptoms of HIV?

Like most STDs, HIV often does not show any symptoms initially, even for years. Sometimes people may experience symptoms within a few weeks of exposure, however these symptoms may go unnoticed or look like other common illnesses. The only way to know if you have HIV is to get tested.

What's involved in HIV testing?

There are several different types of HIV tests. Some use blood, others test cells inside the mouth. HIV blood tests may be done by finger stick or a draw from the inner arm. Oral HIV tests use a swab of the mouth. Rapid HIV tests can provide results in under 20 minutes, sometimes as fast as one minute. Home tests can be purchased in many drug stores.

If you have a preference for the type of test, ask your healthcare provider what options are available.

How do you treat HIV?

Antiretrovirals (ARVs) – prescription medications used to treat HIV – work to lower the amount of virus in the body (viral load), often to levels that are undetectable by standard lab tests. The vast majority of people who take their ARVs every day as prescribed and remain in care are able to achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load. In addition to improving health, getting and keeping a low viral load also prevents the spread of the virus to others.

A person diagnosed with HIV today who is on ongoing antiretroviral (ARV) medication and in medical care can live a normal, healthy lifespan and have children without HIV.

What happens if HIV is not treated?

Taking HIV treatment every day as prescribed prevents illness and the spread of the virus to others. Left untreated, HIV can lead to death.

Missing doses of antiretrovirals (ARVs) can cause the amount of virus in the body to rise. This may result in the virus becoming resistant to a particular HIV treatment, possibly making that treatment not work as well, including reducing the preventative benefits.

If you are having difficulty taking or keeping up with your treatment, talk with your healthcare provider as soon as possible and consider using additional strategies to prevent sexual HIV transmission. Your provider can work with you to help get you back on track, including trying different ARVs if needed.

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HPV (Human Papillomavirus)

HPV is the most common STD. There are more than 150 different types of HPV. Many forms of HPV do not show any symptoms. Some cause genital warts. The HPV vaccine protects against certain types which are associated with genital warts and cervical cancer.

How do you get HPV?

About 40 types of HPV infect the genital area - the vulva, vagina, cervix, rectum, anus, penis, and scrotum - as well as the mouth and throat.

These kinds of HPV are transmitted from sexual skin-to-skin contact when the vulva, vagina, cervix, penis, or anus touches someone with HPV's genitals or mouth and throat.

If you do not have HPV, the vaccine can help protect you from certain types, including those associated with cervical cancer. When used consistently and correctly, condoms can protect against HPV and many other STDs.

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccines protect against certain types of HPV that can lead to cancer or genital warts. HPV vaccines work extremely well. Clinical trials showed HPV vaccines provide close to 100% protection against cervical precancers and genital warts.

The HPV vaccine is most effective during adolescence, when the body produces more

antibodies against the virus. The HPV vaccine is given in a series of shots. For people ages 9-14, there are two shots. For people over 15, the vaccine is given as a series of three shots.

What are the symptoms of HPV?

HPV, like most STDs, often does not show any symptoms.

Two types of HPV (6 and 11) can cause genital warts, which are harmless growths on the skin of the vulva, vagina, cervix, penis, scrotum, or anus. Genital warts look like fleshy, soft bumps that sometimes resemble miniature cauliflower. Usually painless, these can be treated and removed just like the warts you might get on your hands or feet.

What's involved in HPV testing?

Pap smears do not directly test for HPV, but can detect abnormal cell changes in the cervix of women that are likely caused by HPV and can lead to cancer. If abnormal cells are detected, a healthcare provider will advise on monitoring and treatment.

There is an HPV test that can find some high-risk types of the virus directly, but it may not be widely available. It may be provided as a follow-up to a Pap test that finds abnormal cells or when Pap test results are not clear.

For men, there currently no test approved to detect high-risk HPV. By getting vaccinated against HPV, men can help to prevent transmission.

How do you treat HPV?

There is no cure for HPV. The vaccine is the best defense against cancer caused by HPV, as well as genital warts. Regular pap smears for women are also critical to finding abnormal cell changes in the cervix early. Genital warts may be removed by a health care provider to prevent the spread of that type of HPV.

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Syphilis

Syphilis is a common STD. It often does not show any symptoms. Left untreated, it can cause permanent damage, like blindness or paralysis. Once diagnosed, it is easily cured with antibiotics.

How do you get syphilis?

Syphilis is transmitted from skin-to-skin contact through vaginal and anal sex. It is less common – but still possible – to get it from oral sex.

A mother can also pass syphilis to a baby during pregnancy and childbirth if the mother is infected and not treated.

When used consistently and correctly, condoms protect against syphilis and many other STDs.

What are the symptoms of syphilis?

Like most STDs, syphilis often does not show symptoms. The only way to know is to get tested.

There are several stages of syphilis and symptoms can vary with each stage. In the primary stage, symptoms may include sores on the vulva, vagina, anus, penis, scrotum, or mouth, but many people do not notice or have sores. Syphilis sores (called a chancre) are usually firm, round, and painless, or sometimes open and wet.

In the secondary stage, symptoms often include a rash – which can be hard to see and usually does not itch. You may feel sick and have mild flu-like symptoms, like a slight fever, tiredness, sore throat, swollen glands, headache, and muscle aches.

What's involved in syphilis testing?

Syphilis is tested with a blood sample. If you have open sores, a healthcare provider may gently swab the area to take a sample of fluid and test it.

How do you treat syphilis?

When diagnosed early, syphilis can be easily cured with antibiotics (usually penicillin) prescribed by a healthcare provider.

It is important to complete the full treatment, as prescribed by a healthcare provider, even if symptoms go away sooner. The infection stays in the body until the antibiotics course is completed. You should not share your medication with others, or take anyone else's medication.

Some healthcare providers may give a separate dose of antibiotics for your partner(s) to avoid re-infecting each other or anyone else. Do not have sex until you have finished treatment.

Get tested again in 3-4 months to make sure the infection is gone and you were not re-exposed.

What happens if syphilis is not treated?

Syphilis is easily cured with antibiotics in the early stages. Left untreated, syphilis can cause tumors, blindness, and paralysis, damage the nervous system, brain and other organs, and may even kill you.

If you are pregnant and have syphilis that is not treated, it can be passed to the baby during pregnancy or birth – called congenital syphilis. Congenital syphilis can lead to stillbirth, birth defects, or infant death.

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Trichomoniasis (Trich)

Trichomoniasis is a very common STD. Sometimes called “trich” for short. There are an estimated 3.7 million people living with trich in the U.S. It often does not show any symptoms. Once diagnosed, it is easily cured with antibiotics. Trich is usually not serious and can be cured in most cases.

How do you get trich?

Trich is caused by a tiny parasite (you cannot see it with the naked eye) called a trichomonas. It is transmitted when semen (cum), pre-cum, or vaginal fluids get on or inside the penis, vulva, or vagina.

Trich is often transmitted during vaginal sex, but can also be passed by vulva-to-vulva contact, sharing sex toys, and touching your own or your partner's genitals if you have infected fluids on your hand. Trich can easily infect the vulva, vagina, penis, and urethra, but it usually does not infect other body parts (like the mouth or anus).

When used consistently and correctly, condoms protect against trich and many other STDs.

What are the symptoms of trich?

Like most STDs, trich often does not show any symptoms. The only way to know is to get tested.

When symptoms do appear it is usually three days to a month after infection and can be barely noticeable, or really painful and irritating. It is common for the symptoms to come and go, but that doesn't mean the infection went away.

If trich does cause symptoms, the most common one is Vaginitis, which is when the vulva or vagina is irritated. Signs of trich can also include irritation and itching, smelly discharge, or painful or frequent peeing. Trich is very unlikely to cause symptoms in men.

What's involved in trich testing?

There are different tests for trich. It can be as simple and easy as peeing in a cup. Some health providers might use a genital swab (like a big Q-tip) to take cell samples from your penis or vagina. The samples are then tested for trich.

How do you treat trich?

Trich can be easily cured with antibiotics prescribed by a healthcare provider.

It is important to complete the full treatment, as prescribed by your healthcare provider, even if symptoms go away sooner. The infection stays in your body until you finish the antibiotics. Also, do not share your medicine with anyone or take someone else's.

Some healthcare providers may give a separate dose of antibiotics for your partner(s) so you do not re-infect each other or anyone else. Do not have sex until you've finished treatment.

Get tested again in 3-4 months to make sure the infection is gone and you were not re-exposed.

What happens if trich is not treated?

Trich is usually not serious and can be cured in most cases. But if you don't get treated for trich, you can pass the infection to your partners — even if you don't have symptoms.

If you have trich during your pregnancy and do not treat it, the baby may be born early or at a low birth weight.