



Regardless of Education Still Growing Problem

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Reporter

Young adults in this country put themselves in high-risk situations all too frequently. One of the worst risks is participating in unprotected sex, which puts all involved in danger of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease or causing an unwanted pregnancy.

"People aged 15-25 don't think it's going to happen to them," said Dr. William Hawkins, Elon University physician and medical director. "That's why they drive too fast, drink too much and that's why they jump over fires after their school wins a basketball game. They think nothing will happen to them even though they know the risks and dangers of their actions."

Injuries can heal and the effects of drugs and alcohol can pass, but the consequences of having unprotected sex and acquiring STD's will stay with an individual forever.

Although there has been a strong push over the past few decades to educate the youth of America and increase awareness about STD's, it is still a problem.

According to the American Social Health Association, two-thirds of all STDs occur in people 25 years of age or younger.

In August 2003, the Society for Adolescent Medicine released a national survey that found about 56 percent of college students living away from home are sexually active and of that, 73 percent reported having unprotected sex.

The Major Players for College-Aged People

Although the most commonly known and the most life threatening of all STDs, AIDS is not the most prevalent in the United States or on college campuses.

"We see more chlamydia, occasional gonorrhea and I really can't remember the last time I've seen a positive syphilis test here," Hawkins said.

Chlamydia is a bacterial sexually transmitted disease and is the most common STD among college-aged people. There are an estimated 3 million people in the U.S. who have the disease, and as many as one in 10 sexually active women would test positive for it, according to the American Social Health Association.

Chlamydia bacteria are passed from one person to another through contact during sexual intercourse; it is uncommonly passed through oral-genital contact.

Once a person has contracted chlamydia there could be anywhere from one to three weeks before that person starts to see symptoms. Some people have been known not to show any symptoms at all.

A second kind of STD plaguing college campuses is the human papillomavirus, the most common STD in the U.S. today. Some types of HPV cause genital warts.

"HPV is the most common STD I see here on campus," Hawkins said. "It's the fastest growing STD in the country over the past few years."

There are more than 100 known strands of HPV, more than 30 of them being known to cause genital warts. The warts can take anywhere from three weeks to three months to appear. This makes HPV dangerous because a person might not know he or she has contracted the disease for some time, meanwhile continuing to be sexually active.

A third STD prevalent among college-aged students is gonorrhea, a bacteria disease that in some cases is also called "the clap."

Gonorrhea can be passed from one person to another through all types of sexual contact. According to the ASHA, the gonorrhea bacteria thrives on soft skin, usually mucous membranes including the urethra, vagina, cervix, anus, lining of ones eyelid and throat.

Symptoms for gonorrhea become visible in men two to five days after exposure; most women will remain asymptomatic but if women do show symptoms they will be visible within 10 days of contracting the disease, according to the ASHA.

Like chlamydia, gonorrhea can cause very serious complications down the road if left untreated.

Disease Symptoms

Chlamydia

Women may experience an inflamed rectum, inflamed urethra or a vaginal discharge.

Men may experience a discharge from the penis, pain or swelling of the testicles and pain or swelling of the testicles.

HPV

Women may get genital warts around the vagina.

Men may get genital warts around the penis.

Gonorrhea

Women may experience discharge from the vagina, pain or burning during urination. If untreated the disease could develop into chronic pelvic pain.

Men might experience pain during urination, a discharge from the penis and urinating more often than normal.