

The burning issue: PMBs and your sexual health

In this issue of CMScript we focus on sexually transmitted infections as a prescribed minimum benefit or PMB condition. Medical schemes are required to fund the benefits prescribed in the Medical Schemes Act.

The World Health Organisation says that in developing countries, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and their complications rank in the top five disease categories for which adults seek healthcare. It is possible to pass on a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) but not exhibit the symptoms associated with it; this is why the term "STI" is more accurate and now commonly used. STIs are the main preventable cause of infertility in women, and having an STI increases the chances of acquiring and transmitting HIV and Aids.

What are Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)?

STIs are infections that spread primarily through person-to-person sexual contact. (See sidebar on other ways in which STIs can spread.) The most common STIs are caused by bacteria, viruses and parasites. Several, in particular HIV and syphilis, can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy and childbirth, and through blood and tissue transfer such as organ donation.

Other ways of contracting STIs:

- Sharing dirty needles
- Sitting on a toilet seat that was occupied by someone with syphilis without wiping it first
- Mother to child transmission at birth

- Urethral discharge
- Genital ulcers
- Swelling of the genitals
- Vaginal discharge
- Lower abdominal pain
- Burning during urination
- Frequent urination
- Fever
- Itching and redness in the genital area
- Skin rash and muscle pain (associated with secondary syphilis)
- Internal organs especially the brain, heart, liver and spinal cord get affected (only with tertiary syphilis)

Preventing STIs

The most effective way to avoid being infected with or transmitting an STI is to abstain from sexual intercourse or to have sexual intercourse with only one uninfected partner. Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are highly effective in preventing the transmission of STIs including HIV.

What do PMBs cover for STIs?

PMBs cover the diagnosis, treatment and care of all sexually transmitted diseases if you are HIV-positive; HIV management is effective only if you treat the STD as well. If you are HIV-negative, only syphilis and STIs affecting your whole body (systemic) are covered.

References:

World Health Organisation (www.who.int)

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What are the types of STIs?

There are at least 25 sexually transmitted diseases with a range of symptoms, the most common being syphilis, genital herpes, Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia. It is possible to have more than one STI at a time.

What are the symptoms of STIs?

STIs may be asymptomatic but the most common symptoms include: