

INTRODUCTION

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Infection is the most common complication of sexual intercourse. The types of diseases spread by sexual contact vary in their incidence and clinical manifestations throughout the world. In the United Kingdom, the sexually transmitted diseases are now the commonest group of infectious diseases (Adler, 1987).

Viruses play an important role in these sexually transmitted diseases. Viral infection has been known for almost a century, yet the description of it as a venereal infection was suggested only in the last 30 years (Amstey, 1985).

The genital tract serves as a portal of infection for both partners during sexual activity and as a source of infection for the fetus as it passes down the birth canal.

Herpes simplex type I & II viruses and cytomegalovirus have been isolated from cervical secretions. Also, cytomegalovirus has been isolated from male semen. Cervical or penile lesions may result from herpes infections. Also, sexual practices involving oral or anal contact may result in infections in these sites with

herpes virus, cytomegalovirus and possibly hepatitis B virus (Evans, 1984). AIDS or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is a highly lethal disease which is caused by a retrovirus (McMillan, 1985). This virus is transmitted through sexual contact, parenteral exposure to blood, blood products and from mother to child during the perinatal period (Handsfield et al., 1985).

Molluscum Contagiosum is a benign infectious disease of the skin caused by poxvirus mollusci (Gross et al., 1986). It is transmitted by direct contact and may be transmitted sexually (Baxby, 1984).

Condyloma accuminata (Anogenital warts) are caused by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and is sexually transmitted (McMillan, 1985).

In this work the different aspects of the role of viruses in sexually transmitted diseases will be discussed. A review of the relevant literature will be attempted.