

Gonorrhea General Information

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by bacteria.

Who can get gonorrhea?

People get gonorrhea by having sex with someone who has the infection. “Having sex” means anal, vaginal, or oral sex. The infection passes from one person to another through body fluids from the penis, vagina, mouth or rectum. Babies can get the infection in their eyes at the time of birth if the mother is infected.

What are the symptoms?

Many people can have gonorrhea without any symptoms. If you do have symptoms, they usually start 2 to 7 days after contact with a person who has been infected. There may be other sexually transmitted infections present, so individuals should be checked for other infections when they see their health care provider. Symptoms may include:

| Females | Males |
|---|---|
| Discharge from vagina and/or rectum | Discharge from penis and/or rectum |
| Pain and/or cramping in the lower abdomen | Pain and or swelling in one or both testicles |
| Vaginal bleeding between periods and/or after intercourse | Pain when urinating |
| Pain when urinating | Sore throat or difficulty swallowing |
| Sore throat or difficulty swallowing | Rectal pain |
| Rectal pain | |

What is the treatment?

Gonorrhea can be treated with antibiotics.

While on antibiotics the individual should refrain from sexual contact. If you have gonorrhea you should inform all your sexual partners so that they can be tested and treated. If your symptoms continue for more than a few days after receiving treatment, you should return to a health care provider to be re-evaluated.

Gonorrhea treatment does not protect a person from getting it again. If a person is treated and their sex partner(s) are not, the bacteria will be able to pass back to the person again.

What are the complications of gonorrhoea?

Untreated gonorrhoea can cause serious and permanent health problems in both women and men.

In women, gonorrhoea can spread into the uterus or fallopian tubes and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). The symptoms may be mild or can be very severe and can include abdominal pain and fever. PID can lead to internal abscesses (pus-filled pockets that are hard to cure) and chronic (long-lasting) pelvic pain. PID can damage the fallopian tubes enough that a woman will be unable to have children. It also can increase her risk of ectopic pregnancy. Ectopic pregnancy is a life-threatening condition in which a fertilized egg grows outside the uterus, usually in a fallopian tube.

In men, gonorrhoea can cause epididymitis, a painful condition in the tubes attached to the testicles. In rare cases, this may impact a man's ability to have children.

If not treated, gonorrhoea can also spread to the blood or joints. This condition can be life-threatening.

A newborn can get gonorrhoea during the birth process which may cause blindness and sepsis (infection of the bloodstream).

How can you prevent gonorrhoea?

You can reduce your risk of getting gonorrhoea by practicing safer sex by:

- Limiting the number of sexual partners you have.
- Using a latex or polyurethane condom and/or oral dam consistently and correctly every time you have sex, including oral and anal sex.
- Not sharing sex toys; and ensuring they are cleaned and disinfected after each use.