

### What is it?

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

### How is it spread?

You can get gonorrhea if you have oral, vaginal or anal sex with someone who has it, especially if you do not use condoms or if the condom breaks or slips. Gonorrhea can also pass from an infected pregnant woman to her unborn baby at birth. Gonorrhea is curable, but you can get it again if you have sex with an infected person.

### What are the symptoms?

Over 50% of men and women will not have symptoms and will not know they have it unless they are tested. It will take two to five days for symptoms to appear for those who have symptoms. Some people will not have symptoms for 30 days.

Women's symptoms can include:

- A white or yellow smelly discharge from the vagina.
- A burning or painful feeling when you urinate or pee.
- Pain where the uterus is (in the lower abdomen).
- Pain when you have sex.
- Vaginal bleeding when it is not time for your period or during or right after sex.
- Pain, bleeding, itchiness and discharge from the rectum.
- Eye discharge.
- Sore throat and swollen glands.

Men's symptoms can include:

- A green or yellow smelly discharge from the penis.
- A burning feeling when you urinate or pee.
- Itchiness inside the penis.
- Pain or swelling in the testicles.
- Pain, bleeding, itchiness and discharge from the rectum.
- Eye discharge.
- Sore throat and swollen glands.

### How can you get tested for gonorrhea?

A woman can be tested for gonorrhea and chlamydia with a urine sample or by swabs of the cervix. A man can be tested with a urine test or by swabbing the opening of the penis. It is important that the person is not having any bleeding at the time of the urine test and that he or she has not gone to the bathroom for at least 1-2 hours before giving the sample. A person can be infected with gonorrhea and chlamydia at the same time, so it is important to be tested or both. If a person has only had oral or anal sex with another person, a swab of the throat or rectum can be done.

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## What can gonorrhoea do to the body?

- Gonorrhoea can cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) of the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries, if not cured quickly enough. PID can cause abdominal pain, fever, and the pain may never go away. When a woman has PID her fallopian tubes can be fully or partially blocked with scar tissue. She may not be able to become pregnant if the sperm cannot get to the egg. She may be at a higher risk for a tubal or ectopic pregnancy, if the fertilized egg cannot get into the uterus. An ectopic pregnancy can be life-threatening.
- Men can have scar tissue form in the urethra, making it hard to urinate. The vas deferens tubes can become blocked as well preventing the sperm to enter the semen, making them unable to cause a pregnancy. A man's epididymis and testicles can become infected.
- If gonorrhoea enters the blood, it can infect the joints (a type of arthritis called Reiter's Syndrome), the skin, the heart and the brain of males and females.
- All people are at an increased risk of picking up HIV when infected with gonorrhoea.
- Newborn babies that are infected at birth can become blind; develop a joint infection or a life-threatening blood infection.

## How is it treated?

Gonorrhoea is cured with antibiotic pills or injection given to you with a prescription. You may be treated for chlamydia as well. The Sexual Health Clinic at your local health unit can give medication with the prescription or with a positive test result. It is important to finish all the antibiotics given to you. You should not have sex with anyone, including your partner, until both of you are treated and retested. Retesting should be completed after six months.

## What about sexual partners?

The people you had sexual contact with in the last 60 days, or who you last had sex with, also need to be tested and treated. These people need to be called to tell them. This can be done by Public Health, without sharing your name.

## How can I avoid becoming infected with gonorrhoea?

- Abstain from having sex
- Always use condoms and dental dams
- Do not share sex toys
- Limit the number of people you have sex with
- Ask your partner about his or her sexual history
- Get tested before having sex with a new partner and ask him or her to be tested
- Take care if drinking or using drugs to avoid unplanned sexual contact

## Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | [www.hpepublichealth.ca](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca)

## References

- Calgary Health Region, Health Information Gonorrhoea, September 2009.
- Health Canada, It's Your Health Gonorrhoea, July 2004
- Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections, 2008.
- Toronto Public Health, Gonorrhoea, March 2003.

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