



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.*

## Helping Hand™

*Health Education for Patients and Families*

# Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea (gon-o-REE-ah) is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the germ *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. Anyone that is sexually active is at risk of getting gonorrhea. Those who have had more than one sexual partner are at higher risk of getting infected.

Most people do not know they are infected or have symptoms. They can give the infection to others without knowing it. Any vaginal, oral, or anal contact with genitalia (vagina or penis) can pass the germ from one person to another.

## How gonorrhea spreads

- vaginal sex
- oral sex
- anal sex
- contact between genitals
- contact between genital fluids and eyes
- during vaginal delivery from an infected mother to baby

## Severe gonorrhea

If treated early, the infection can be cured. If not treated, it can cause severe damage.

- If it is serious enough, gonorrhea can spread through your blood. This can cause damage to your joints, heart, or brain.
- For those born female, severe gonorrhea can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID occurs when the infection spreads to the uterus, fallopian tubes and/or ovaries. This can make you sterile (unable to get pregnant) and cause long-term pelvic pain.
- For those born male, gonorrhea can cause an irritation of the urethra (urinary tube). If not treated, it can spread to the epididymis, where sperm is stored.

## Signs and symptoms

Gonorrhea can be in the body for a long time with no signs.

### Possible symptoms are:

- pain or burning when you urinate (pee)
- discharge from genitals
- discharge from the throat or rectum
- male at birth – fever, swollen scrotum, or pain around the bladder, groin, or rectum,
- female at birth – fever, chills, vomiting, pain in the belly, pain with sex or unusual menstrual bleeding

## Testing

See your health care provider if you think you have gonorrhea or have had sex with someone that you know has gonorrhea. See your provider even if you do not have symptoms. You need to be tested for the infection (Picture 1).

- Tell your health care provider if there is any chance you could be pregnant.
- Your provider will use one or all of the following tests based on your symptoms:
  - urine sample
  - vaginal swab
  - rectal swab
  - pharyngeal (throat) swab

## Treatment

- Your health care provider will prescribe antibiotic medicine if you have gonorrhea. For the infection to completely go away, you must take **all** of the medicine.
- Wait for 1 week after you and your partner(s) are treated before having sex. During the first 7 days, you can still spread the infection.



**Picture 1** Preparing for a swab test.

## Treatment for partners

- You and your partner(s) must be treated. Treatment not only protects your sexual partner(s), but it also keeps you from getting infected again.
- If you do not think your partner(s) will get treated on their own, tell your health care provider. They may be able to write a prescription for your partner's treatment. This is called expedited partner therapy (EPT).
- In the Columbus area, your partner(s) can be treated for free at the Columbus City Health Department, 240 Parsons Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43215. You can call there at (614) 645-7417. If you live outside of Columbus, call your local health department.

## Preventing future infection

Abstinence (not having sex) is the best way to avoid other STIs and HIV. If you do have sex, some things might help prevent the spread of STIs:

- Limit your number of sexual partners. Know your partner(s) and their sexual history.
- **Use a condom** every time you have sex, the whole time you have sex.
- Have an extra condom with you in case the one you are using breaks.
- Get tested for other STIs and HIV. Having gonorrhea can increase your risk of these other infections.

## Follow-up

- You and your partner(s) **must** be treated and have a follow-up health care visit if the symptoms do not go away.
- Come back for ALL follow-up appointments.
- Get re-tested in 3 months. People who are infected with gonorrhea once are more likely to get it again.

## More information

If you have any questions, call the Adolescent Medicine Clinic at (614) 722-2450. You can also call the National STD Hotline at (800) 232-4636, 8 a.m. to 11 p.m., Monday through Friday, or you can get information at <http://www.ashastd.org>.