

Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea (gon-o-REE-ah) is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the bacteria (germ) *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. Sexual intercourse, oral sex or any contact between a man's penis and a woman's vagina can pass the germ from one person to another. It can also be spread during anal sex. It can also be spread from an infected mother to her baby during a vaginal delivery.

Who Can Get Gonorrhea

Anyone who is sexually active has a chance of getting gonorrhea. Those who have had more than one partner are at greater risk. Most people have no symptoms and do not realize they have the disease. They can give it to others without knowing it.

Why Gonorrhea Is Harmful

If gonorrhea is treated early, it can be cured fairly easily. If it is not treated, gonorrhea can cause serious damage in both males and females. It can spread through the blood and cause damage to joints, the heart muscle or the brain.

If a female has a severe gonorrhea infection, she may get an infection in her fallopian tubes and ovaries. This could make her sterile (unable to have babies). This infection is called PID (pelvic inflammatory disease). PID can cause long-term pelvic pain. Both males and females may not be able to have children if they have repeated infections or are not treated.

Signs and Symptoms of Gonorrhea

- No symptoms at all
- Burning during urination
- Abnormal menstrual bleeding
- Discharge from the penis or vagina
- Discharge from the throat or rectum
- Females may have pain in the lower belly with fever, chills and vomiting.
- Males may have pain around the bladder area, or pain in the groin or rectum. Fever may be present. The scrotum may be swollen.

If You Think You Have Gonorrhea

- If you do not have symptoms, but have had sex with someone who has gonorrhea, see your health care provider. You will need to be tested for the infection and treated with antibiotics.
- If you have any symptoms of gonorrhea, see your health care provider for an exam. There is a test that can be done to see if you have this infection. You will need to be treated with antibiotics.
- Be sure to tell your health care provider if there is any chance you may be pregnant.
- Gonorrhea can be cured with antibiotics. For the infection to go away completely, you must get an injection or TAKE YOUR MEDICINE UNTIL ALL THE MEDICINE IS GONE.
- AVOID SEXUAL CONTACT until one week after you are finished with your antibiotic treatment.
- After treatment, a test should be done in two to three months to be sure you no longer have gonorrhea.
- Your partner needs to be treated before you have sexual contact again.

Testing for Gonorrhea

Sexually active young women should be tested for gonorrhea once each year. In women who do not have symptoms, this is done by a test of their urine.

Women - if symptoms are present:

The doctor or nurse practitioner examines the genital area. A metal or plastic speculum is used to look inside the vagina. Samples of discharge are taken from the cervix. The samples are examined by the lab for gonorrhea. If there are no symptoms, a urine sample may be taken to test for gonorrhea.

Men – if symptoms are present:

A urine sample is taken to test for the gonorrhea germ.

Treatment for Partners

- Antibiotics are required to treat gonorrhea. You may receive an injection or a prescription for pills.
- You and your partner(s) must **both** be treated and you should wait for one week before having sexual intercourse. The treatment not only protects the sexual partner. It also prevents the person already being treated from getting gonorrhea back again.
- If you live in the Columbus area, your partner(s) can be treated at the Columbus City Health Department, 240 Parsons Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43215. The phone number is (614) 645-7772. If you live outside the Columbus area, call your local health department.

Follow-Up Visits

You and your partner must BOTH be treated and need to have a follow-up doctor's visit if the symptoms do not go away. You need to come back for ALL follow-up appointments.

- Contact your sex partner(s) so that he or she may receive treatment also.
- You should be tested for gonorrhea again in 2 to 3 months.

Preventing Future Infection

Abstinence (not having sex) is the only 100% effective way to prevent gonorrhea, other STI's and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS). If you choose to have sex, you can do some things that might help prevent the spread of other STI's:

- Respect yourself and your partner.
- Limit the number of sexual partners. Know your partner and his or her sexual history.
- ALWAYS USE A LATEX CONDOM. Use it correctly. Use a condom every time you have sex, the whole time you have sex.
- Be prepared. Have another condom available in case the one you are using breaks.
- Avoid mind-altering substances such as alcohol and other drugs. You cannot make good decisions if you are drunk or high.
- Some STI's make it easier for HIV to enter the skin and mucous membranes. If you have an STI, you should consider being tested for HIV.
- If a woman is pregnant and thinks she has gonorrhea, she should call her health care provider immediately.
- It is a good idea for sexually active teens to be tested for STI'S at least once a year even if there are no symptoms.

If you have any questions, call the Adolescent Medicine Clinic at (614) 722-2450. For more information, you may also call the National STD Hotline at 1-800-227-8922, 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, or you can get information at <http://www.ashastd.org/sitemap.cfm>.