

What is it?

Gonorrhea is a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) caused by a bacterium called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

How is it spread?

Gonorrhea is spread through unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected person. Sometimes gonorrhea can be spread to the eyes by hands that have had direct contact with the infected fluids. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during birth.

What are the symptoms?

Over 50% of men and women infected with gonorrhea have no symptoms. They can unknowingly pass the infection on to their sexual partner(s).

The incubation period can be 2 to 10 days from the time a person is exposed to gonorrhea and sometimes longer.

Women may have pain during urination, or bleeding during or after sexual intercourse or pain in the lower abdomen. Intercourse can be painful. Abnormal bleeding may occur between periods. Many women may only have more white or yellow smelly vaginal discharge.

Men may have yellow or white smelly discharge, or itching around the urethra (opening in the penis). Men may also have to urinate more often and may have pain when they do. Pain and swelling in the testicles can occur.

In both men and women, gonorrhea from oral sex can cause a sore throat and swollen glands. Gonorrhea from anal sex may cause discharge, bleeding and itchiness from the anus. Sometimes there are no symptoms.

How is it diagnosed?

Gonorrhea may be diagnosed in men either by sending a urine sample or a swab of the discharge from the urethra to the laboratory. In women swabs need to be taken from the cervix and sent for testing. In both men and women swabs from the throat or rectum may be sent for testing.

What are the complications?

Untreated gonorrhea in women may lead to a condition called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). It is a serious infection of the lining of the womb or uterus, the fallopian tubes and the ovaries. Sometimes the fallopian tubes of a woman with PID are blocked by scar tissue and her eggs cannot pass through. When this happens, she may not be able to get pregnant. If the fallopian tubes are only partly blocked so that sperm can pass through, she may end up with a pregnancy inside the fallopian tube. This is called an ectopic or tubal pregnancy. This is a medical emergency and the woman needs to go to hospital for treatment. Women with untreated gonorrhea may also have miscarriages. Some women will continue to have chronic pelvic pain.

Men with untreated gonorrhoea may become sterile when the tubes carrying the sperm are blocked by scar tissue. Some men may have swelling and pain in their testicles, a condition called epididymitis.

Infants who are born to mothers with untreated gonorrhoea may develop serious eye infections that could lead to blindness.

How is it treated?

Gonorrhoea is treated with antibiotic pills. The medication often used is called Cefixime which is taken in a single dose. Sometimes gonorrhoea is treated with an antibiotic injection. People may have chlamydia at the same time as gonorrhoea. An antibiotic to treat chlamydia will be given at the same time. Even if your symptoms have disappeared, you must finish all pills to make sure that you are cured. It is important for the person with gonorrhoea and their partner(s) to not have sex, even with a condom, until 7 days after they have finished taking all of their medication.

What about sexual partners?

All sexual partners within the past 60 days should be examined and treated. If you have not had sex in the past 2 months, then your last sexual partner should be examined and treated. Tell your partner(s) that having no symptoms does not mean there is no infection. A public health nurse can notify your partner(s) for you. Your name will be kept confidential.

Is follow-up important?

In some cases the doctor will advise you to have a follow-up test to make sure you are cured. This follow-up test should be done at least 1 week after you have completed the treatment.

Remember:

- Take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor or clinic.
- Avoid sex for 7 days after you and your sexual partner(s) have been treated. You can get reinfected every time you have sex with an untreated infected partner.
- If you have an untreated STI like gonorrhoea, it is easier to get HIV from a person who has it.
- Use condoms to lower the chance of getting STIs.
- It is possible to have more than one infection at a time, so it is important to be tested for other STIs.

For more information:

**Call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at 416-392-2437
or go to www.toronto.ca/health**

**Safer
SEX**

To reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted Infection (STI), use a condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.