

Gonorrhea General Information

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by bacteria that affects both men and women.

Who can get gonorrhea?

People get gonorrhea by having sex with someone who has the infection. “Having sex” means anal, vagina, 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.

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 symptoms?

Many people can have gonorrhea without any symptoms at all. Symptoms 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 the doctor. Symptoms to look for are:

- unusual discharge from the penis, vagina or rectum
- vaginal bleeding between periods
- pain or burning when urinating
- pain or cramping in the lower abdominal area for women
- sore throat or difficulty swallowing
- pain in the testicles for men

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. 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.

What are the complications of gonorrhea?

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

In women, gonorrhea can spread into the uterus (womb) or fallopian tubes (egg canals) 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 prevent a man from being able to father children.

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

How can you prevent gonorrhoea?

You can reduce your risk of getting gonorrhoea by:

- practicing safer sex
- limiting the number of sexual partners you have
- learning about prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases
- seeing your doctor if you have any of the above symptoms

For more information about sexually transmitted infections please see the Public Health Agency of Canada website: phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/faq-eng.php