



Gonorrhea

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a bacterial infection that both men and women can get.

How is gonorrhea spread?

Gonorrhea is spread through contact with an infected person during vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Many women with gonorrhea do not have symptoms. If symptoms ARE experienced, they may include inflammation of the reproductive system, rectum, or mouth, depending on where the infection is located. *A woman* may experience unusual vaginal discharge (drip), pain or bleeding during or after sex, and pain or burning during urination. *A man* may experience a thick, yellow or greenish discharge or pus from the penis, and pain or burning during urination.

Gonorrhea infection of the rectum can cause pain, rectal bleeding, pus or mucous discharge from the rectum, or constipation.

If you think you've been exposed to gonorrhea, your provider can do tests to see if you're infected, whether you have symptoms or not. *(Giving your doctor a chance to find infections that don't have symptoms is one reason it's so important to get regular check-ups, even when you're not feeling sick!)*

How will I know if I have gonorrhea?

Your doctor or other health-care provider will collect a sample of fluid from the cervix, penis, rectum, or mouth with a small swab and have it tested at a laboratory. Gonorrhea can also be detected using a urine sample.

How is gonorrhea treated?

Antibiotics can cure gonorrhea, often in a single dose. A person can become re-infected after treatment if exposed to gonorrhea again.

What happens if gonorrhea is left untreated?

If left untreated, gonorrhea can spread and cause severe pain and permanent damage to the reproductive system or serious blood infection. It may make both women and men infertile.

In women, gonorrhea can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID often has no symptoms, but when symptoms are experienced, they may include lower belly pain; cramping; burning during urination; pain or bleeding during or after intercourse; unusual vaginal discharge; nausea and vomiting, and fever. If left untreated, PID can make it difficult or impossible to get or to stay pregnant. It can also lead to "tubal" (ectopic) pregnancies and long-term pelvic pain.

Like other STDs, if left untreated, gonorrhea can increase a person's chance of getting or spreading HIV. If you have symptoms or think you've been exposed to gonorrhea, get tested and treated immediately to avoid complications.

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Gonorrhea, Continued

Do sex partners have to be treated?

Yes. If you're diagnosed with gonorrhea, it's important to tell everyone you've had sex with over past 2 months, so they can be examined and treated, too. Take *all* your medication as directed, even if you feel better before the medicine is finished. Don't have sex until you and the people you've had sex with have been completely treated and all symptoms have disappeared, or you could infect each other again.

What if I'm pregnant?

Untreated gonorrhea during pregnancy can cause premature labor and miscarriage. It can also cause infections in the eyes of the newborn baby.

All pregnant women should be tested for gonorrhea and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV, as early as possible in pregnancy. You should be tested again during your pregnancy if you are at higher risk for getting an STD. For example, you are at higher risk if you have a new partner during pregnancy, or if you have more than one partner. If left untreated, STDs can be devastating for your baby. To protect yourself and your baby against HIV and other STDs, use a latex condom whenever you have sex.

How can I avoid gonorrhea?

Sexually transmitted infections can be avoided by not having sex. *If you are sexually active*, you can reduce your risk of getting gonorrhea and most other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV, by having sex only in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner you are sure is not infected. If you are having sex outside of such a relationship, you can reduce your risk of STDs by:

- 1) *Always using a latex condom (or other type of latex barrier) whenever you have sex – vaginal, anal, or oral.* Condoms made of "natural" materials, such as lambskin, protect against pregnancy, but not against STDs. If you are allergic to latex, you can use condoms made of polyurethane or other synthetic materials.
- 2) *Limiting the number of people you have sex with.*
The more partners you have, the higher your risk.
- 3) *Avoiding alcohol and drugs when you have sex.* Drinking or getting high makes it much harder to remember to use condoms to protect yourself and others. For free, confidential help with a substance abuse problem, call 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638), or just call 311.

More information

Free, confidential STD exams and treatment, and confidential or anonymous HIV counseling and testing, are available at Health Department clinics in all 5 boroughs of New York City. Health insurance, proof of citizenship, and parental consent are NOT required. For a list of clinics and hours, visit nyc.gov/health, or call 311.

