

## What is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmissible infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. It is spread by having unprotected (sex without a condom) vaginal, oral or anal sex with a person who is infected.

Gonorrhoea can affect both men and women and most commonly infects the urethra, cervix, rectum or throat.

## What are the symptoms?

Some people may not have any symptoms and can be infected without knowing that anything is wrong. Even without symptoms, gonorrhoea can still be passed on through unprotected sex.

People generally get the disease 1-14 days after being exposed.

Symptoms for men can include:

- Yellow or white discharge from the penis;
- Pain and burning when passing urine;
- Redness around the opening of the penis;
- Painful and swollen testes;
- Anal discharge and discomfort;
- Sore, dry throat.

Symptoms for women can include:

- Pain and burning when passing urine;
- Unusual vaginal discharge;
- Irregular vaginal bleeding;
- Pain during or after sex;
- Anal discharge and discomfort;
- Sore, dry throat.

## What are the complications?

If left untreated in men, gonorrhoea can lead to swelling and pain in the epididymis or testicles which can lead to infertility.

In women, untreated gonorrhoea may lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). This is when the reproductive organs become infected. PID may cause blockage of the tubes leading to ectopic pregnancies (the pregnancy develops in the fallopian tubes instead of the uterus), infertility (when the fallopian tubes become damaged by scar tissue) or chronic pelvic pain.

Babies born to mothers with gonorrhoea can develop severe eye infections which can lead to blindness.

Rarely, gonorrhoea may spread via the blood stream to cause severe joint pain and other internal infections.

Having gonorrhoea can make it easier for a person to become infected with HIV or to pass HIV on to someone else.

## How do you test for gonorrhoea?

Testing for gonorrhoea involves taking a swab (a sample of secretions) from the urethra in men and the cervix in women. Swabs may also be taken from the rectum and occasionally the throat. Diagnosis can also be made by a urine test.

## How is gonorrhoea treated?

Treatment is usually with one antibiotic injection in the buttock, as well as oral antibiotic tablets. It is important to be treated to prevent complications to yourself and prevent spread of the infection, even if you have no symptoms.

## What about my sexual partners?

Sexual partners who are exposed to gonorrhoea by vaginal, oral or anal sex are at high risk of the infection. Current partners should be tested and treated, regardless of their results. Other partners in at least the last 2 months, or since your last negative test, should be tested for gonorrhoea.

## When can I have sex again?

It is very important that you don't have sex at all during your treatment. If you do, and the gonorrhoea infection has not been completely treated, then the infection could be passed back and forth between you and your partner(s). It is recommended that you do not have vaginal, oral or anal sex for 7 days after treatment.

## Do I need further tests after I have been treated?

Yes. To check that treatment has been successful and you haven't been re-infected with gonorrhoea, it is recommended you have a repeat test. The length of time before the repeat test will depend on the site of infection, your treatment and whether your symptoms have resolved. Your practitioner will discuss when you need to have repeat testing.

## How do I avoid getting infected again?

- Make sure that your current sexual partner(s) are tested and treated.
- Always use a condom for both anal and vaginal sex and consider one for oral sex too.
- Ask new partners to get an STI check before you decide to stop using condoms.

## Need more information?

For more information about gonorrhoea, contact your general practitioner, Canberra Sexual Health Centre on **(02) 6244 2184** or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on **(02) 6205 2155**.

## Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service is

*responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.*

*Gonorrhoea is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers.*

## Acknowledgements

1. Heymann DL, 2015, *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 20th edition.
2. Canberra Sexual Health Centre (2104), Gonorrhoea Fact Sheet.

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