

What You Should Know About Gonorrhoea?

Public Health Branch - Factsheet

What is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that can infect both men and women, especially sexually active adolescents and younger adults. It can cause infections in the genitals, rectum, and throat.

How is gonorrhoea spread?

Transmission occurs through having anal, vaginal, or oral sex with someone who has gonorrhoea. A pregnant woman with gonorrhoea can give the infection to her baby during childbirth.

Am I at risk for gonorrhoea?

Any sexually active person can get gonorrhoea through unprotected anal, vaginal, or oral sex.

How common is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections.

How does gonorrhoea affect my baby?

If you are pregnant and have gonorrhoea, you can give the infection to your baby during delivery. This can cause serious health problems for your baby. Early gonorrhoea diagnosis and treatment will make health complications for your baby less likely.

How do I know if I have gonorrhoea?

1. Men:

Some men with gonorrhoea may have no symptoms at all. However, men who do have symptoms may have:

- a burning sensation when passing urine
- a white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis
- painful or swollen testicles (although this is less common)

2. Women:

Most women with gonorrhoea do not have any symptoms. Even when a woman has symptoms, they are often mild and can be mistaken for a bladder or vaginal infection. Women with gonorrhoea are at risk of developing serious complications, (see “what happens if I don’t get treated”), even if they don’t have any symptoms. Symptoms in women can include:

- painful or burning sensation when passing urine
- increased vaginal discharge
- vaginal bleeding between periods or after sex

Rectal infections may either cause no symptoms or cause symptoms in both men and women that may include:

- discharge
- anal itching
- soreness
- bleeding
- painful bowel movements

Do not have sex and see your doctor immediately if you and/or your partner have any of the symptoms listed above or any symptoms of another STI such as a new sore/ulcer, a smelly discharge, burning when passing urine, or bleeding between periods/after sex.

How will my doctor know if I have gonorrhoea?

Most of the time, urine can be used to test for gonorrhoea. However, if you have had oral and/or anal sex, swabs may be used to collect samples from your throat and/or rectum.

In some cases, a swab may be used to collect a sample from a man’s urethra (urine canal) or a woman’s cervix (opening to the womb).

What You Should Know About Gonorrhea?

Can gonorrhea be cured?

Yes, gonorrhea can be cured with the right treatment. Although medication will stop the infection, it will not undo any permanent damage caused by the disease. Treatment for gonorrhea is available through your health care provider, free of charge.

It is becoming harder to treat some gonorrhea, as drug-resistant strains of gonorrhea are increasing. If your symptoms continue for more than three to five days after receiving treatment, you should return to a health care provider to be checked again.

I've been treated. Can I get gonorrhea again?

Yes. Having gonorrhea once does not protect you from getting it again. Even after you've been successfully treated, you can still be re-infected if you have unprotected sex with an infected partner.

I was treated for gonorrhea. When can I have sex again?

You should wait at least three days after finishing all medications and until symptoms and signs of infection are gone, before having sex.

What happens if I don't get treated?

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

In women, untreated gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease which might lead to pregnancy outside the womb, blockage of the fallopian tubes and inability to get pregnant.

In men, gonorrhea can cause a painful condition in the tubes attached to the testicles. In rare cases, this may cause a man to be sterile (prevent him from being able to father a child).

Rarely, untreated gonorrhea can also spread to your blood or joints. This condition can be life-threatening.

Untreated gonorrhea may also increase your chances of getting or giving HIV – the virus that causes AIDS.

How can gonorrhea be prevented?

If you are sexually active, there are actions you can take to lower your chances of getting gonorrhea:

- Correct and consistent use of condoms every time you have sex.
- Avoid alcohol and drug use that may lead to risky sexual behaviour.
- Get tested regularly if you are having unprotected sex.
- Avoid sexual activity.

Where can I go to get more information?

For more information and/or if you have any questions:

- contact your physician or local public health office
- call Health Links - Info Santé at 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg or toll-free outside of Winnipeg at 1-888-315-9257
- visit www.gov.mb.ca/health
- visit www.sexualityandu.ca