

# Gonorrhea

## What is Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacteria (germ) called *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. Gonorrhea is a common STI.

Gonorrhea bacteria can grow and multiply in a female's cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes and urethra, and in a male's urethra. The bacteria can also grow in the mouth, throat and anus of both women and men.

## Who Can Get Gonorrhea?

Anyone who is sexually active can become infected with gonorrhea. It is important you tell your health care provider about any symptoms you have, if you have any sex practices that may put you at risk for a sexually transmitted infection, or both.

## How is Gonorrhea Spread?

- Gonorrhea is spread during sexual contact with the penis, vagina, mouth or anus of an infected partner.
- It can also be spread from an infected mother to their baby during birth.
- Ejaculation does not need to happen for gonorrhea to be spread.
- People who had gonorrhea and received treatment can be infected again if they have sexual contact with someone who is infected with gonorrhea.

## What are the Symptoms of Gonorrhea?

Symptoms usually appear 2 to 5 days after sexual contact with an infected person. Symptoms may take up to 30 days to appear.

Many people infected with gonorrhea do not have any symptoms.

Symptoms in females are often mild and thought to be a bladder or vaginal infection.

Symptoms may include:

- pain or burning while urinating or having a bowel movement
- unusual vaginal bleeding, discharge or discomfort
- lower abdominal pain or cramps (pain increases during periods)
- anal discomfort, itching or discharge.

Symptoms in males may include:

- pain or burning while urinating or having a bowel movement
- white, yellow or green discharge from the penis
- painful or swollen testicles or scrotum
- anal discomfort, itching or discharge.

Both females and males can have infections in their throat. When this happens, they have a sore throat or have no symptoms at all.

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## How is Gonorrhea Found?

Your health care provider can tell if you have gonorrhea by testing your urine or getting samples from your urethra, cervix or vagina.

If you have had anal or oral sex, a swab of your rectum or throat may be done.

## How is Gonorrhea Treated?

Most gonorrhea infections can be treated with a single injection of an antibiotic.

If your symptoms continue for more than a few days after receiving treatment, return to your health care provider for follow up.

## What are the Possible Side Effects of Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is easy to cure when treated. Having a gonorrhea infection can make it easier to transmit or get HIV during sex. (HIV is the virus that causes AIDS.)

If left untreated, it can cause the following side effects.

- In females, untreated gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can lead to:
  - infertility (being unable to conceive a baby)
  - scar tissue growth in the fallopian tubes
  - ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus)
  - long-lasting pelvic pain.
  - Tell your health care provider if you have symptoms of PID such as pain in your lower abdomen, fever, unusual vaginal discharge or odor, pain or bleeding when you have sex, burning when you urinate or bleeding between periods.
- In males, untreated gonorrhea can cause:
  - epididymitis (painful condition of the testicles that can lead to infertility)
  - scarring inside the urethra (making urination difficult).

- If gonorrhea is passed to a baby during birth, it can cause an eye infection or affect other parts of the body.
- In females and males, gonorrhea can spread to the blood and joints, which can be life-threatening.

## How Long can the Germ be Spread?

A gonorrhea infection can last for years if it is not treated. It's important that you call your health care provider if you are in the at-risk group or if you have concerns about your sex partner(s).

You can get gonorrhea again any time you are exposed — even if you've been treated for it before.

## What Prevents the Spread of the Germ?

The best ways to avoid getting STIs are:

- do not have vaginal, anal or oral sex
- be in a long-term relationship with only one partner who has been tested and is not infected.

Latex condoms can reduce the risk of spreading gonorrhea. Condoms should be worn during vaginal, anal or oral sex.

Anyone diagnosed or treated for gonorrhea, should tell all recent anal, vaginal or oral sex partners (all partners within 60 days before the onset of symptoms or diagnosis). They will also need to be treated.

This will reduce the risk that the sex partners will develop serious side effects from gonorrhea and will reduce the person's risk of being reinfected with the bacteria.

A person with gonorrhea and all of their sex partners must avoid having sex until they have finished their treatment for gonorrhea and no longer have symptoms.

**Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Minnesota Department of Health.**