

# Gonorrhea

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## What is Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD). It is caused by a bacteria. Gonorrhea is sometimes called "the clap". Gonorrhea can infect the vagina, cervix, rectum, penis, urethra, or sometimes the throat. Gonorrhea can be easily cured. Because gonorrhea usually has no signs or symptoms, many people don't realize they are infected.

## How many people get Gonorrhea?

About 500,000 to 600,000 new cases of Gonorrhea occur each year in the United States.

## How is Gonorrhea transmitted?

Gonorrhea is spread through unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex with an infected partner – even if that person has no symptoms. Ejaculation does not have to happen to get Gonorrhea. It can also be passed from mother to baby during birth.

## What are the symptoms of Gonorrhea?

Most women (and some men) who have Gonorrhea don't notice anything wrong. If symptoms occur, they usually show up 1-2 weeks after infection. These are the main symptoms, listed from most common to less common:

### *Men*

- Pain or burning while urinating.
- Itching inside the penis.
- Painful, swollen testicle.

### *Women*

- Unusual vaginal discharge.
- Pain or burning while urinating.
- Bleeding between periods or after sex.
- Pain during sex.
- Stomach pain.
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If Gonorrhea is in the throat or rectum, there may be few or no symptoms. Some people feel a sore throat or itching and pain in the rectum. Even if you don't have symptoms, you can still have Gonorrhea and pass it on to others.

## What happens if I have Gonorrhea?

**Gonorrhea infection makes it easier to get HIV and other STDs and pass them to sex partners.** Without treatment, Gonorrhea may spread inside the body. There, it can cause *pelvic inflammatory disease* (PID) in women and *epididymitis* in men, two very serious illnesses. Rarely, the gonococcus bacteria can get into the blood and cause a kind of arthritis and other problems.

- **Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)** can develop if Gonorrhea spreads to the uterus and fallopian tubes. PID can result in chronic pelvic pain, infertility, or tubal pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus). Symptoms of PID include pain in the lower abdomen or back, fever, spotting or bleeding between menstrual periods, pain during sex, and increased vaginal discharge.
- **Epididymitis** results when untreated infections in men spread into the testicles. This leads to pain or swelling in the scrotal area, which is a sign of inflammation of a part of the testicle called the epididymis. Epididymitis is often painful and, if it involves both testicles, can lead to infertility.
- **Disseminated Gonococcal Infection** occurs when Gonorrhea gets into the blood. This is rare but can be very serious. The main symptoms are joint pain and swelling, fever and skin rash.

### **How do I avoid getting Gonorrhea?**

The only sure way to avoid Gonorrhea and other STDs is to not have sex (abstinence). If you do have sex:

- Talk with your partner(s) about Gonorrhea and other STDs. Work out a plan to reduce risks that you both can agree on.
- Use male or female condoms the right way and every time you have sex.
- Don't have sex if you notice any unusual discharge from your partner's penis, vagina, or anus.
- Have sex with only one partner who has sex only with you (mutual monogamy.)
- Have sex with fewer people. More partners = more risk.

No method of birth control, except condoms, protects you against any STD.

If you think you might have Gonorrhea (or any STD), seek care at a health care provider or clinic. If you have Gonorrhea, tell all of your sex partners so they can get treated also.

### **How do I find out if I have Gonorrhea?**

The only way to be sure is to get tested. The test is easy – either a urine sample or a fluid sample from the penis, vagina, rectum, or throat is taken and sent to a lab. When a woman has discharge from her cervix or a man has discharge from his penis, it is often possible to test for Gonorrhea by looking at the discharge under a microscope.

Otherwise the sample is sent to a lab for testing, and results are available a few days later. Tests can usually detect Gonorrhea 3 - 7 days after infection. Many healthcare providers do not test for Gonorrhea unless you ask. Getting a pap smear doesn't mean you have been tested for Gonorrhea or any other STD.

### **How is Gonorrhea treated?**

Gonorrhea is usually treated with a single dose of an antibiotic. This can usually be taken by mouth, but sometimes an injection is required. Because Gonorrhea and Chlamydia often occur together, people with Gonorrhea may be treated for both

diseases at the same time. Not all antibiotics work against Gonorrhea, so your healthcare provider will suggest the best one for you.

#### Important information about treatment:

- Take all of the medicine prescribed, even if symptoms go away.
- Never treat yourself with old, leftover antibiotics or other pills from home.
- Do not split your own medication with partners. Some healthcare providers will give extra medication to take home to your partners.
- Make sure your sex partners get treated too so you don't get infected again.
- Don't douche or use an enema.

People should not have sex for 7 days after treatment. Recent or regular sex partners must also be treated before having sex again or they may re-infect one another. Everyone should get tested again 3 months after treatment to be sure they have not been infected again since being treated.

#### **How does Gonorrhea affect pregnancy?**

Gonorrhea can cause a pregnant woman to go into labor early or deliver a low-birth weight baby. Gonorrhea can spread from mother to baby during birth and cause a serious infection in the baby's eyes that may lead to blindness. A pregnant woman can be treated to prevent transmission to the baby. **All pregnant women should be tested for Gonorrhea, even if they don't seem to be at risk.**

#### **For more help**

- Washington State HIV/HEPC/STD hotline - (800) 272-AIDS (2437) - Testing and treatment resources and information.
- American Social Health Association STI Resource Center - (919) 361-8488 - STI/STD information.
- Centers for Disease Control National STD/HIV Hotline - (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636) Spanish (800) 344-7432, TTY (800) 243-7889 - General information on many health topics including STDs and HIV.

#### **More information**

- [American Social Health Association Gonorrhea information](#)
- [Gonorrhea fact sheet](#) (Centers for Disease Control)
- [Gonorrhea information](#) (Planned Parenthood)



