

GONORRHEA FACT SHEET

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WHAT IS GONORRHEA?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can cause infection in the genitals, rectum, and/or throat. It is very common, especially amongst people between the ages of 15–24 years old.

HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

You can get gonorrhea by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has gonorrhea. Additionally, a pregnant person with untreated gonorrhea can transfer the infection to their baby during childbirth.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Gonorrhea is one of the STD/STIs that can often show no symptoms – even so, it can cause serious and long term effects without present symptoms.

Most individuals with vagina's do not report symptoms – if symptoms are present, they are often mild and can be confused for a different kind of infection like a UTI. Present symptoms can include:

- Vaginal bleeding between menstruation cycles;
- Increased vaginal discharge; and
- Painful/burning sensation when peeing.

Individuals with penis' who have present symptoms can include:

- Painful/burning sensation when peeing;
- White, yellow, or green discharge from the penis; and
- Swollen or painful testicles (less common)

Rectal infections may cause symptoms regardless of sex/gender and can include:

- Painful bowel movements;
- Anal itching;
- Discharge;
- Soreness; and
- Bleeding

You should see a healthcare professional if you or your partner(s) notice any of these symptoms or if you/your partner have a known STD.

COMPLICATIONS OF GONORRHEA

Untreated gonorrhea can cause serious and life long health complications. For those that have a uterus, untreated gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), of which the following complications can occur:

- Long term pelvic/abdominal pain
- Ectopic pregnancy
- Formation of scar tissue that blocks fallopian tubes; and
- Infertility

For those that have a penis, gonorrhea can cause a painful condition associated with the tubes attached to the testicles, which can lead to infertility. Rarely, untreated gonorrhea can spread to your blood and joints which can cause a life threatening condition. Untreated gonorrhea can increase your chances of contracting and/or spreading HIV.

WHO'S AT RISK?

Any sexually active individual can contract and spread gonorrhea through vaginal, anal, and/or oral sex with a partner. Having an open and honest conversation about your sexual practices with your health practitioner is always recommended for guidance specific to your sexual practices. Generally, if you are a sexually active person with a penis who also has sex with individuals with penises, it is recommended that you get tested for gonorrhea annually. If you are a sexually active person with a vagina, it is recommended that you get tested for gonorrhea annually if:

- Younger than 25 years of age
- 25 years old or older with additional risk factors such as new or multiple sex partners, or a sex partner that has a known STI/STD

I'M PREGNANT – WHAT NOW?

If you are pregnant and positive for gonorrhea, you can pass the infection to your child via childbirth and this can lead to serious health problems. If you are pregnant and suspect that you are gonorrhea, please talk to your healthcare provider about examination, testing, and treatment. The sooner you receive treatment, the less likely there will be health complications for your baby.

TEST OPTIONS

Often, testing will be conducted via a urine sample – if you have also had oral and/or anal sex, your health practitioner might also utilize swabs to collect a sample from your throat and/or rectum. Certain cases might warrant a swab collected from the urethra in the penis or the cervix.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

The right treatment can cure gonorrhea – it is important to complete the treatment plan your health practitioner provides entirely i.e. do not share your medication or take only a portion of the medication provided. Medication will stop the infection, however, it will not undo any permanent damage caused by the disease.

Return to your healthcare provider if you find that your symptoms are not resolving for more than a few days after starting treatment – as drug resistant strains of gonorrhea increase, it has become harder to treat some gonorrhea strains.

WHEN TO HAVE SEX AGAIN?

You should wait 7 full days after completing treatment to have sex again – if you've had gonorrhea and received treatment in the past, you can still contract gonorrhea again. As such, you and your partner(s) should avoid having sex until treatment is completed and symptoms have fully resolved to prevent reinfection. Three months after treatment, you and your partner(s) should be retested regardless of a successful treatment.