

Gonorrhoea

What is gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is a sexually transmissible infection (STI) caused by the bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. Gonorrhoea can cause infection of the urethra (tube that connects the bladder to the outside of the body), cervix (the lower part of the womb), anus, throat and less commonly, the eyes.

How did I get infected with gonorrhoea?

Gonorrhoea is spread by having unprotected (sex without a condom) vaginal, oral or anal sex with someone who is infected with gonorrhoea.

What are the symptoms?

Gonorrhoea can affect both men and women and the symptoms depend on the site of the infection. Sometimes there are no symptoms at all particularly in the cervix, throat and anus. Even without symptoms, gonorrhoea can still be passed on through unprotected sexual contact.

People generally become infected 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 testicles;
- 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.

How is gonorrhoea diagnosed?

Diagnosis of gonorrhoea is based on laboratory testing which involves collecting a urine specimen or swab (a sample of secretions) from the relevant body site i.e. the cervix, vagina, urethra, anus or throat. The bacteria in the sample are grown in the laboratory to determine which antibiotic will be most successful in treating the gonorrhoea.

How is gonorrhoea treated?

Treatment is usually one antibiotic injection in the buttock together with oral antibiotic tablets. To prevent the spread of the infection or complications, it is important you are treated, even if you have no symptoms. It is also important that you do not have sexual contact during your treatment and for 7 days after treatment has finished.

What happens if gonorrhoea is not treated?

- If left untreated in men, gonorrhoea can cause long-lasting irritation in the penis or pain in the testicles, as well as damage to the tubes that transport sperm.
- In women, untreated gonorrhoea may cause infection in the uterus and fallopian tubes known as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can have serious effects including infertility, chronic pelvic pain and ectopic (tubal) pregnancy.
- Babies born to mothers with gonorrhoea can develop severe eye infections which can lead to blindness.
- In both men and women, 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.

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 also 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 has finished.

Do I need further tests after I have been treated?

Yes, you need repeat testing to check the treatment has been successful and that you haven't been re-infected. The length of time you need to wait before the repeat test depends on the site of infection. Your healthcare provider will discuss this with you.

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. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. 20th edn. Washington: American Public Health Association, USA; 2015.
2. Canberra Sexual Health Centre (2017), Gonorrhoea Fact Sheet.

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