

# Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is one of the common bacterial sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). It is caused by the bacterium neisseria gonorrhoeae and can infect the cervix, uterus, and fallopian tubes of women and the urethra, mouth, throat, and rectum of both men and women. Because the signs of gonorrhea often go unnoticed, an individual can develop serious health complications before they recognize they are infected.

## PREVALENCE

Each year approximately 650,000 people in the US are infected with gonorrhea. Approximately 75% of all reported gonorrhea cases in the US are found in individuals 15 to 29-years-old. The highest rates of infection are usually found in 15 to 19-year-old women and 20 to 24-year-old men.

## TRANSMISSION

Gonorrhea can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex and can be transmitted even if there are no signs or symptoms of infection. Since the bacteria can live for up to 4 hours outside of the body, people can also get gonorrhea from casual contact, although this is rare. The bacteria can be transmitted to different areas of the body through infected hands, or by sharing clothing such as bathing suits or using washcloths of infected individuals soon after they have used them. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her newborn during vaginal childbirth.

## SYMPTOMS

Gonorrhea can be present in an individual without producing symptoms. If symptoms appear, they usually appear in women within 10 days and in men within 2 to 5 days, but can take as long as 30 days to surface. Even if you do not have symptoms, you can spread the infection to others if you do not use condoms or dental dams during sex.

Ninety percent of women may have no symptoms at all and even when a woman does have symptoms, the symptoms can be confused with urinary tract infections (UTIs) or vaginal infections. Often, the first indication a woman is infected may arise when a partner is diagnosed. Men are more likely to have symptoms, but symptoms in men can also go undetected.

In women, symptoms may include:

- Burning during urination
- Yellowish-greenish discharge from the vagina
- Pain in the pelvic or abdominal area
- Fever
- Unusual vaginal bleeding
- Painful sexual activity
- Bleeding after sexual activity
- Swelling or tenderness of the vulva
- Arthritic pain

In men, symptoms may include:

- Burning during urination
- Yellowish-white discharge from the penis
- Fever
- Swollen or painful testicles

For both genders, gonorrhea infection may also occur in the throat, causing a minor sore throat or no symptoms at all and may also occur in the rectum, causing pus-like or bloody discharge, anal itching, soreness, bleeding, and sometimes painful bowel movements.

## DIAGNOSIS

Your medical provider will take a swab of the infected cervix, vagina, rectum, urethra, or throat and this will be analyzed by a lab test. You can make an appointment with University Health Service (275-2662) or you can contact another testing site in Rochester.

## TREATMENT

Gonorrhea infections are treated with antibiotics. All partners must be treated. Once you are treated you will also need follow-up cultures and an examination. Although it is generally easy to treat, some gonorrhea organisms are becoming resistant to antibiotic drug treatment. Even if symptoms are relieved, it is important to take the entire prescription to make sure the infection is gone.

If you find out that you are infected with gonorrhea, you should also notify your sex partner(s) so that they can be treated, even if they do not have symptoms. This will reduce the risk of your partner(s) experiencing complications from an infection and will reduce your risk of being re-infected. You should not have sex with your partner(s) until you complete your treatment and your partner(s) are tested and receive their treatment.

If you have had gonorrhea in the past and have been treated, you can get the disease again if you have sexual contact with an infected person.

## HEALTH RISKS

If left untreated, gonorrhea may cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and ectopic pregnancy in women, and sterility, arthritis, and heart problems in both women and men.

## APPOINTMENTS AT UHS

The University Health Service (UHS) offers a full range of health care services for men and women. You can schedule an appointment with your primary care provider (PCP) by calling 275-2662. Women can also schedule an appointment with one of the women's health nurse practitioners. All visits to UHS are confidential.

## LINKS

For more information about gonorrhea, you can visit:

Planned Parenthood  
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

CDC Fact Sheet  
<http://www.cdc.gov/std/Gonorrhea/STDFact-gonorrhea.htm>