



Gonorrhea

(gone-or-ee-ah)

What is Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) caused by a bacterium (germ).

How can a person get Gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is spread when someone has vaginal, anal or oral sex with someone who is infected. Gonorrhea can also be passed from mother to child during birth. It is passed through vaginal fluids and semen.

You can increase your risk of infection by:

- Having sex without using a latex or polyurethane condom
- Having multiple sex partners
- Having a different STI or HIV
- Having sex while high on drugs or under the influence of alcohol can increase your risk as this makes it less likely that condoms will be used correctly

Who can get Gonorrhea?

Anyone who is sexually active can get gonorrhea. Having unprotected sex (sex without a condom) increases the chance of getting gonorrhea. In Boston, women under 24 years of age have the highest rates of gonorrhea.

What are the symptoms of Gonorrhea?

Many people do not have symptoms. Symptoms usually start 2 days after being infected, but can take longer.

For those who do have symptoms, the most common ones are:

For Women:

- Unusual or increased discharge (yellowish or whitish fluid) from the vagina
- Pain and/or burning when she pees or during sex
- Pain in the stomach or back
- Bleeding even when it's not her period
- In more serious infections, fever

For Men:

- Unusual discharge (thick white or watery fluid) coming from the penis
- Pain and/or burning when he pees or urge to pee a lot
- Less common symptoms include:
 - Heavy feeling and/or pain in the testicles

Symptoms from **anal infection** may cause pain, itching, discharge or bleeding from the rectum (bum) and painful bowel movements. An **oral infection** may cause a sore throat.

How long can an infected person spread Gonorrhea?

A person can spread gonorrhea to others from the time they become infected (by having unprotected sex with an infected partner) until they are treated. A person can spread gonorrhea to others even if they do not have symptoms. If you are taking medicine, do not have sex for 7 days after your treatment is over. It is important to know that you can get infected with gonorrhea many times.

How can I find out if I have Gonorrhea?

The only way to know for sure if you have gonorrhea is to **get tested**. A healthcare provider may ask for a urine (pee) sample or may wipe the infected area with a swab to test for gonorrhea. Many people with gonorrhea also have Chlamydia and should be tested and treated for both.

How often should I be tested?

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends **testing** for:
 - All sexually active women under 25 and,
 - People at high risk, including:
 - Those who have had unprotected sex,
 - Sex with multiple partners, or with a new partner or
- All pregnant women
- 1 to 3 months after treatment for a Sexually Transmitted Infection
- Every time you have a new partner if you are unsure of their status

Where can I get tested?

Most health care providers offer testing for Chlamydia and other STIs. To find a health care center in a neighborhood near you, call the Mayor's Health Line at **617-534-5050 and Toll-Free: 1-800-847-0710** or visit <http://www.hivtest.org/STDTTesting.aspx> and enter your zip code.

Can Gonorrhea be treated?

Yes, gonorrhea is easily treated. A single dose of antibiotics can cure most cases of gonorrhea. See your healthcare provider again if you still have symptoms after you have taken your medicine.

Should my partner get treated?

Recent (within the last 60 days) or regular sex partners **must be treated** before having sex again so it is best to be treated at the same time. It is important to know that you can get infected with gonorrhea many times.

What happens if Gonorrhea is not treated?

If left untreated, gonorrhea can cause very serious health problems. Women can develop Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID) which can cause infertility (unable to have children). Men can develop epididymitis. Gonorrhea can also increase your chances of getting other sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV or Chlamydia.

How can you protect yourself from getting Gonorrhea?

The only 100% effective way to prevent Gonorrhea is to not have sex.

If you do have sex, you can limit your risk by taking the following steps:

- Always use a latex or polyurethane condom or barrier (dental dam) when having anal, vaginal and/or oral sex
 - Condoms made from "natural" materials may protect against pregnancy but NOT STIs
- Reduce your number of partners if you choose to have sex
- Talk with your partner about their STI status and getting tested
- Talk with your health care provider about sex safety and getting tested
- Understand that having sex while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol can increase the likelihood of unprotected sex
- Contact your health care provider if you experience any symptoms



**For more information contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Infectious Disease Bureau
617-534-5611 or www.bphc.org**