



Gonorrhea

What is gonorrhea?

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

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.

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, males between the ages of 25-29 have the highest rates of gonorrhea.

You have a higher risk of infection if you:

- Have sex without using a latex or polyurethane condom
- Have multiple sex partners
- Have a different STI or HIV
- Have sex while high on drugs or under the influence of alcohol (less likely that condoms will be used correctly)

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Many people do not have symptoms. If symptoms occur, they can appear 2 days after infection, but can take longer. These symptoms include:

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

For Men and Women: 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 gonorrhea more than once.

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?

- Sexually active men who have sex with men should be tested every year
- Sexually active women younger than 25 years or an older women with risk factors such as new or multiple sex partners, or a sex partner who has a sexually transmitted infection, you should be tested every year.
- People who have unprotected sex or have sex with multiple partners, or with a new partner should be tested more often
- All pregnant women should be tested
- People who have been treated for an STI should be tested 1 to 3 months after completing treatment

Where can I get tested?

Most health care providers offer testing for gonorrhea and other STIs. To find a health care center in a neighborhood near you, call the Mayor's Health Line at **617-534-5050** or visit <http://www.hivtest.org/STDTesting.aspx>.

Can gonorrhea be treated?

Yes, gonorrhea can be cured with the right treatment. A single dose of antibiotics (intramuscular ceftriaxone AND oral azithromycin) can cure most cases of gonorrhea. Drug-resistant gonorrhea is a growing concern. That is why it is important for you to see your healthcare provider again if you still have symptoms after you have taken your medicine. Remember to take the medicine as directed and never share your medication with others.

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 gonorrhea again if you have sex with an untreated partner or a new partner.

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, nitrile, 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 safer sex practices 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

