

New York State Department of Health

Gonorrhea Gonococcal Infection (clap, drip)

Last Reviewed: November 2006

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is an infection that is spread through sexual contact with another person. The gonorrhea germs are found in the mucous areas of the body (the vagina, penis, throat and rectum).

Who gets gonorrhea?

Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhea. Most often, gonorrhea is found in younger people (ages 15-30) who have multiple sex partners. Gonorrhea is reported more frequently from urban areas than from rural areas.

How is gonorrhea spread?

Gonorrhea is spread through sexual contact. This includes penis to vagina, penis to mouth, penis to rectum and mouth to vagina contact. Gonorrhea can also be spread from mother to child during birth.

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

Men infected with gonorrhea will have burning while urinating and a yellowish white discharge from the penis. Those few women with symptoms will have a discharge from the vagina and possibly some burning while urinating. Infections in the throat and rectum cause few symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

In males, symptoms usually appear two to seven days after infection but it can take as long as 30 days for symptoms to begin. Often, there are no symptoms for people infected with gonorrhea; 10 to 15 percent of men and about 80 percent of women may have no symptoms. People with no symptoms are at risk for developing complications to gonorrhea. These people also spread this infection unknowingly.

When and for how long is a person able to spread gonorrhea?

From the time a person is infected with gonorrhea, he or she can spread the disease. A person can continue to spread the infection until properly treated.

Does past infection with gonorrhea make a person immune?

Past infection does not make a person immune to gonorrhea. Previous infections with gonorrhea may allow complications to occur more rapidly.

What is the treatment for gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is treated with cephalosporin or quinalone type of antibiotics. All strains of gonorrhea are curable but some strains are becoming more and more resistant to many standard medications.

What happens if gonorrhea goes untreated??

If a person is not treated for gonorrhea, there is a good chance complications will occur. Women frequently suffer from pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a painful condition that occurs when the infection spreads throughout the reproductive organs. PID can lead to sterilization in females. Men may suffer from swelling of the testicles and penis. Both sexes may suffer from arthritis, skin problems and other organ infections caused by the spread of gonorrhea within the body.

What can be done to prevent the spread of gonorrhea?

Sexual relations should be approached responsibly.

- Limit the number of your sex partners.
- Use a male or female condom.
- If you think you are infected, avoid any sexual contact and visit a local sexually transmitted disease (STD) clinic, hospital or your doctor.
- Notify all sexual contacts immediately so that they can be examined and treated by a health care provider.

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