

# New York State Department of Health

## Gonorrhea

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### What is gonorrhea?

(gah-noe-ree-uh) "clap" or "drip"

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) which most often affects people between 15 and 25. It's most common among teenage women who have multiple sex partners. It's not unusual to have both gonorrhea and chlamydia at the same time.

### What causes gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is caused by bacteria that can infect your genital tract, throat, and/or rectum.

You can get this STD by having unprotected sex with someone who's infected. Unprotected sex means sex without a latex or polyurethane condom. If you have gonorrhea when you are pregnant, you can give this STD to your baby during delivery.

### What are the signs and symptoms?

Eighty-five to 90 percent of men with gonorrhea will have symptoms. Men's symptoms often appear within a week (usually two to five days) after they are infected. But, symptoms can take as long as 30 days to begin.

Women's symptoms may take longer to appear. Symptoms usually begin in five to 10 days or within 60 days. Only about 50 percent of women have symptoms you can see.

Men's symptoms may include:

- Pus or a "drip" from the penis. This is called urethral discharge.
- Itching, burning or both when urinating (urethritis).
- Redness and swelling of the opening in the penis (the urethral meatus).
- A swollen penis. This is rare.

Women's symptoms may include:

- Fluid (discharge) from the vagina that is greenish-yellow – from an infected cervix.
- Small amounts of blood (spotting) or bleeding, or both, between periods or during sex.
- Sometimes – an unusual fluid from the urinary opening or an itchy, red vulva or both. The fluid is called urethral discharge. The vulva is the outer part of a woman's genitals.
- Pain during sex (sometimes).

Both men and women can get throat infections from oral sex, or infections in the rectum from anal sex. Many people will not have symptoms. But, some people may find that their anus or the lining of their throat is red and swollen. If you have a throat infection, you may also get swollen glands (lymph nodes) in your neck. If you have a rectal infection you may have rectal bleeding, anal itching, soreness, a pus discharge, or pain with your bowel movements.

## Can gonorrhea cause any other problems if it's not treated?

Yes! If you are a woman and you don't treat your infection, part of your reproductive system may get infected. This includes your uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries and even inside your lower belly (abdomen). This infection is called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). If you have PID you may suffer from mild to severe abdominal pain, a fever, and become unable to have children (infertile). A woman with PID may also have chronic pelvic pain and a pregnancy outside of the uterus (an ectopic pregnancy). It is rare, but it is possible to die from an ectopic pregnancy.

Men can develop severe swelling and pain in the testicles (epididymitis), which may result in the inability to make sperm and father children (sterility).

If you don't treat this STD, it can spread through your body and infect your blood, joints, skin, and brain. If you have gonorrhea, you also have a greater risk of getting other STDs such as HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

If you have gonorrhea when you're pregnant, you can give this STD to your baby during vaginal delivery. Infants can also get infections of the throat, bones, blood, and brain. Babies born with gonorrhea, could get a severe eye infection called conjunctivitis. This infection can lead to blindness if it's not treated. Health care providers give medicated eye drops to ALL newborns in New York State right after birth. These drops prevent the baby from getting an eye infection from both gonorrhea and chlamydia.

## How will I know if I have gonorrhea?

To know for sure you should visit a health care provider for a full physical checkup. The provider will use a swab to take a sample from the site of infection (e. g., the urethra, cervix, rectum, and/or eye) and it will be tested for the bacteria. New tests are available that use urine samples to test for gonorrhea. However, this type of testing is not available at all provider offices. Ask your provider if urine testing is available.

You can have gonorrhea and not know it. Many women don't have any signs of this STD. That's why it's important for all sexually active women to have regular pelvic exams. During your exam, your provider can take a sample of your fluid (discharge) to look for gonorrhea.

## Is there a cure?

Yes. Gonorrhea can be cured with antibiotics. Important: Do not treat yourself! Using the wrong kind or dose of medicine, or sharing someone else's medicine, may hide the signs of your infection and create new health problems. If you think you have gonorrhea, go to your health care provider or a clinic. Any medicine you take should be ordered (prescribed) for you and only for you.

## When can I have sex again?

It is best to wait until one week after you and your partner(s) have finished your medicine before you have oral, vaginal or anal sex again. If you finish your medicine and you still have symptoms, return to your provider. Remember: you can get gonorrhea again if your sex partners are not treated.

## What about my partner(s)?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease. Because of this, your sex partners should be both checked and treated even if they do not have symptoms.

## Can I get this infection again?

Yes. Having it once doesn't protect you from either getting or giving gonorrhea again. As soon as you get gonorrhea, you can spread it until you take the right medicine and the infection is gone. You will be at risk for gonorrhea again if your partners do not take medicine and get rid of this STD before you have sex with them.

This includes oral, anal or vaginal sex.

## How can I prevent gonorrhea?

Not having sex (abstinence) is the only sure way to avoid infection.

If you choose to be sexually active, use latex or polyurethane condoms every time you have oral, anal or vaginal sex. This will lower your chances of giving or getting this STD. But, using condoms will not totally stop your risk. This is because condoms are not 100 percent effective. However, condoms greatly lower your risk of getting gonorrhea. They also help prevent the spread of other STDs including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Do not have sex if you think you have gonorrhea or you have been exposed. Visit a health care provider for a checkup. If you are sexually active, you and your partner( s) should get a full physical checkup. This includes a complete sexual history and testing for common STDs. You should be checked for gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, herpes, genital warts, trichomoniasis, and HIV.

## Will anyone know the results of the exams?

Your test results and any treatment will be kept ***absolutely confidential***. No one can find out your results, except you. If you are under 18 you can be checked and treated for STDs without getting permission from your parents.

## To learn more:

If you have any more questions about gonorrhea, or you need to know the location of the nearest clinic, contact your local health department.

**You may also call the National STD Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO 1-800-232-4636.**

Questions or comments: [stdc@health.state.ny.us](mailto:stdc@health.state.ny.us)

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