

# Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is a serious infection of the genital tract in both men and women, caused by a bacterium *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, sometimes called the gonococcus. Gonorrhoea is transmitted sexually, by oral, anal or genital sex.

Both men and woman may have gonorrhoea without having any symptoms and so can be infected, or spread infection, without knowing anything is wrong.

Symptoms that may occur include:

- > *In men*, urethritis (infection of the urethra, the urinary canal leading from the bladder to exit at the tip of the penis). There may be:
  - discharge of pus from the penis
  - a burning sensation in the penis when urinating.

Some men never develop symptoms, but most do.

- > *In women*, gonorrhoea usually affects the cervix (opening of the uterus at the top of the vagina) causing:
  - vaginal discharge
  - discomfort on urination
  - bleeding between periods, often after having sex.

However, there may be only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.

- > In women infection may spread from the cervix to the Fallopian tubes (tubes leading from the ovaries to the uterus), causing pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID due to gonorrhoea is often without symptoms, but there may be:
  - fever
  - low abdominal pain
  - pain on intercourse
  - if untreated, PID may lead to scarring of the Fallopian tubes and ectopic (tubal) pregnancy or eventual infertility.

- > *In both men and women* throat and anal infections can occur following receptive oral and anal intercourse and infections at these sites are often without symptoms.
- > Joint pain and infection (arthritis).
- > *In adults and children* conjunctivitis (inflammation of the lining of the eyelids and eye) may occur. Babies born to infected mothers can become infected as they pass through the infected cervix and may develop gonococcal conjunctivitis soon after birth.

Diagnosis is made by microscopic examination and growth of bacteria from a sample of discharge from the cervix or urethra, or specimens from the throat, rectum, eye or joints. Newer molecular tests such as PCR on urine may be used to screen people with no symptoms.

Having any sexually transmitted infection increases the risk of HIV infection if you are exposed to HIV virus while the other infection is present.

## Incubation period

*(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)*

1 – 10 days, sometimes longer.

## Infectious period

*(time during which an infected person can infect others)*

Months if untreated.

## Treatment

Effective antibiotic treatment is available on prescription from a doctor. After treatment, a follow-up test is done to make sure the infection has been cured.

Treatment is simple if given soon after infection. Infections may cause lifelong complications, particularly in women, if not diagnosed and treated early.

## Gonorrhoea (cont.)

### Control of spread

- > Practise safer sex.
- > No sex (abstinence), or use condoms or dental dams, until antibiotic treatment is completed and a follow-up test has been done to make sure that treatment has cleared the infection.
- > Testing and treatment of sexual partners at the same time.
- > Testing to exclude other sexually transmitted disease is advisable.



**Gonorrhoea is a notifiable disease**

- > PCR
- > Avoiding Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)

### Useful website

- > Clinic 275  
<http://www.stdservices.on.net/>