

GONORRHEA

WHAT IS GONORRHEA?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a bacterium that infects the cervix, urethra, and other reproductive organs. Gonorrhea can also infect the throat and anus.

SYMPTOMS

Many people infected with gonorrhea have no symptoms. As a result, people can unknowingly pass the infection on to their sexual partner(s). If symptoms develop, they usually appear two to seven days after sexual contact with an infected person. Some people can be infected and not have any symptoms.

Symptoms vary depending on which part of the body is infected. Some may have vaginal itching and abnormal discharge from the vagina. They may also have to pass urine more often and have pain in their lower abdomen.

Other people may have yellowish-white discharge from the penis. They may also have a burning sensation when passing urine, frequent passing of urine, or pain and swelling in the testicles.

Gonorrhea infection from oral sex may lead to sore throat and swollen glands.

Gonorrhea infection from anal sex may cause itchiness and discharge from the anus.

HOW IT SPREADS

Gonorrhea is spread through unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected person. It can also be passed from an infected mother to the baby during birth. Until a person finishes treatment, they continue to have the infection and can pass it to others.

DIAGNOSIS

Gonorrhea testing can be done two to three days after a possible exposure.

- Gonorrhea can be tested by urine sample, vaginal swab, throat swab or rectal swab
- For persons with a cervix: a test can also be done by taking a sample from the cervix (the opening to the uterus)
- For persons with a penis: a sample is taken from the urethra
- For urine sample testing people should not pass urine at least one hour before the test

Gonorrhea is a reportable infection. York Region Community and Health Services must be notified so appropriate case and follow-up can be completed.
Always use a condom from beginning to end of all sexual contact to reduce your risk.

TREATMENT

- Gonorrhoea can be treated and cured with oral antibiotics in combination with an intramuscular antibiotic injection
- If you have pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) or epididymitis, you may need to go to a hospital and be treated with intravenous antibiotics
- Do not have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with your sexual partner(s) until seven days after the last partner has completed treatment
- You can get re-infected every time you have sex with an untreated or infected partner

Your last sexual partner and all sexual partners within the past 60 days should be examined and treated. Tell your partner(s) that having no symptoms does not mean there is no infection.

A York Region public health nurse can help you to notify your partner(s) – your name will be kept confidential.

PREVENTION

- Abstain from sex or limit your number of sexual partners
- Make informed decisions by talking to your partner about their sexual health and the use of protection before having sex
- Ask your partner(s) to test before you have sex
- Always use a condom from beginning to end of any vaginal, oral, or anal sex
- Get tested – especially if you've had a new sex partner, more than one sex partner, or if you suspect you have an infection

COMPLICATIONS

- Untreated gonorrhoea may lead to a condition called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID is a serious infection of the lining of the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries
- Sometimes the fallopian tubes of a person with PID are blocked by scar tissue and eggs cannot pass through; when this happens, they may not be able to get pregnant. If the fallopian tubes are only partly blocked, sperm can still pass through, resulting in a pregnancy inside the fallopian tube; this is called an ectopic pregnancy and can be dangerous
- Gonorrhoea can cause a painful condition in the tubes attached to the testicles, which can, in rare cases, lead to infertility
- Rarely, untreated gonorrhoea can also **spread to your blood or joints**; this condition can be life-threatening
- Untreated gonorrhoea may also increase your chances of getting or giving HIV

FOLLOW-UP

- People who have been diagnosed with Gonorrhoea should be retested after they are treated (called a test of cure or TOC) and re-screened again six months later. If re-screening at six months is not possible, cases should be re-screened when they next seek medical care within the next 12 months.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- sexandu.ca
- York Region Public Health Sexual Health Clinics **1-800-361-5653 option, #1**