



## GONORRHEA

### What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, a bacterium that multiplies easily in mucous membranes in the body. Gonorrhea bacteria can grow in the warm, moist areas of the reproductive tract, including the cervix (opening to the womb), uterus (womb), and fallopian tubes (egg canals) in women, and in the urethra (urine canal), mouth, throat and anus in women and men.

### How do people get gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea can be transmitted during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Gonorrhea can also be spread from an infected mother to her newborn during vaginal childbirth.

Gonorrhea infection can spread to other unlikely parts of the body. For example, a person can get an eye infection after touching infected genitals and then the eyes. Individuals who have had gonorrhea and received treatment may get infected again if they have sexual contact with persons infected with gonorrhea.

### What are the signs and symptoms of gonorrhea?

Most men have signs or symptoms such as a burning sensation when urinating and a yellowish white discharge from the penis. Sometimes men with gonorrhea get painful or swollen testicles.

Women experience mild early symptoms including a painful or burning sensation when urinating and a vaginal discharge that is yellow or occasionally bloody. Many infected women have no symptoms, or they are so non-specific that their symptoms are mistaken for a bladder or vaginal infection. Women with no or mild gonorrhea symptoms are still at risk of developing serious complications. Untreated gonorrhea in women can develop into pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). Symptoms of rectal infection include discharge, anal itching, soreness, bleeding, and sometimes painful bowel movements.

### When do symptoms appear?

In males, symptoms usually appear two to five days after infection, but it can take as long as 30 days. Once a person is infected with gonorrhea, he or she can spread the infection to others if condoms or other protective barriers are not used during sex.

### How is gonorrhea diagnosed?

There are laboratory tests to diagnose gonorrhea. Some can be performed on urine; other tests require that a specimen be collected from a site such as the cervix, penis, rectum or throat.

**Contact Number: STD Program, (302) 744-1050**

Revised: 08/2013

Page 1 of 2



## How is gonorrhea treated?

Gonorrhea can be treated and cured with antibiotics. However, many strains of gonorrhea have become resistant to some antibiotics over time. For that reason, it is very important that you complete your medications regime until all of your medication is gone. Many of the currently used antibiotics can successfully cure gonorrhea in adolescents and adults.

## Who is at risk for gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a very common infectious disease. CDC estimates that, annually, 820,000 people in the United States get new gonorrhea infections and less than half of these infections are detected and reported to CDC. CDC estimates that 570,000 of these new gonorrhea infections were among young people 15-24 years of age. In 2011, 321,849 cases of gonorrhea were reported to the CDC.

## What are the complications of gonorrhea?

In both men and women, untreated gonorrhea can cause serious and permanent problems. Women can suffer from pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), infertility, ectopic pregnancies and chronic pelvic pain. Men can develop epididymitis, a painful condition of the testicles that can sometimes lead to infertility if untreated. In men, gonorrhea can affect the prostate and lead to scarring inside the urethra, making urination difficult. In both sexes, gonorrhea can spread to the blood or joints, causing a life-threatening condition. Persons with gonorrhea can more easily contract HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Newborns with gonorrhea are at risk for blindness, joint infection, or a life-threatening blood infection.

## How can gonorrhea be prevented?

The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual contact, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected.

Latex or polyurethane male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of gonorrhea.

**For more information:** Call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-800-232-4636, TTY: 1-888-232-6348 in English and Spanish.