

Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea is caused by bacteria known as *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. It usually affects the genital area, although the throat or anus (back passage) may also be involved. Gonorrhoea affects both men and women and is easily transmitted during vaginal intercourse. It can also be transmitted during anal or oral sex.

Gonorrhoea may not cause symptoms in women

A lack of specific signs and symptoms means gonorrhoea may go undetected for longer in women. Often there are no symptoms. Sometimes, gonorrhoea causes:
An unusual discharge from the vagina
Pain while urinating or passing water.

Untreated gonorrhoea can lead to infertility in women

If left untreated, gonorrhoea can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can cause infertility. Symptoms of PID include:

- Lower abdominal pain and tenderness
- Deep pain during sexual intercourse
- Heavy and painful periods
- Fever.

Women who have had PID need to be especially careful about gonorrhoea, because the risk of infertility increases with each bout of inflammation.

A check for gonorrhoea may be recommended

Because gonorrhoea may not cause symptoms until PID has already developed, sexually active women who have recently had a change of sexual partner or feel they may be at risk of a sexually transmissible infection (STI) should have a test for gonorrhoea (and for chlamydia infection).

Men may experience a burning sensation while urinating

Gonorrhoea commonly infects the inside of the penis (the urethra). Symptoms may include:

- A burning sensation while urinating or passing water
- A white or yellow pus-like discharge from the penis
- Swelling and pain in the testicles, which can occur if the gonorrhoea infection goes untreated.

In a small percentage of men there are no symptoms at all.

Oral and anal gonorrhoea

In both men and women:

- Anal gonorrhoea often occurs without signs or symptoms
- Gonorrhoea in the throat may cause a sore throat, however, it usually occurs without symptoms.

Gonorrhoea is treated with antibiotics

Gonorrhoea is treated with antibiotics. Some strains of gonorrhoea are now resistant to penicillin and some other antibiotics. Tell your doctor if you have been travelling overseas because many of the new resistant strains have originated from outside Australia.

Prevention through the proper use of condoms and dams is best

The best protection against gonorrhoea is to always use barrier protection such as condoms, female condoms and dams (a thin piece of latex placed over the anus or vulva during oral sex). Condoms and dams can be used for oral-vaginal sex and oral-anal sex to help prevent the spread of infection.

Condoms for men can be bought from supermarkets, chemists and other outlets. Female condoms and dams are available through Family Planning Victoria and may be available from selected shops. Latex free condoms are also available from some outlets. Male condoms and lubricant are available free from the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre, along with female condoms and dams on request.

When using a condom for men you should:

- Open the packet carefully so that you don't tear the condom.
- Pinch the tip of the condom before carefully rolling it down the entire shaft of the erect penis.
- Do not use spit, Vaseline, baby oil or other oil-based lubricants.
- Use water-based lubricants, such as KY, Muko or Wet Stuff.
- Withdraw the penis before the erection is lost, so that the condom does not fall off. Hold the base of the condom to prevent spills.
- Store condoms in a cool, dry place and check the expiry date.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre Tel. (03) 9341 6200 or 1800 032 017 or TTY (for the hearing impaired) (03) 9347 8619 or HIV Clinic for HIV Positive People (03) 9341 6214
- Victorian AIDS Council/Gay Men's Health Health Centre Tel. (03) 9865 6700 or 1800 134 840
- Education & Resource Centre at The Alfred Tel. (03) 9276 6993
- The Centre Clinic, Northcote Tel. (03) 9481 7155
- The Centre Clinic, St Kilda Tel. (03) 9525 5866
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9257 0100 or Advice Line on (03) 9257 0116
- Action Centre (for youth 25 years and under) Tel. (03) 9654 4700 or 1800 013 952
- Sexual Health Clinic Ballarat (The Annexe) Tel. (03) 5338 4540
- Bendigo Community Health Tel. (03) 5434 4330 and Bendigo Youth Services Tel. (03) 5448 1600
- Geelong Sexual Health Clinic Tel. (03) 5226 7254
- STD Clinic Wodonga Tel. (03) 6051 7535
- STD/AIDS Clinic Traralgon Tel. (03) 5173 8111
- HIV & Sexual Health Connect Tel. 1800 038 125 or 1800 555 677 TTY (for the hearing or speech impaired) or 13 14 50 for an interpreter

Things to remember

- Gonorrhoea may occur without symptoms, especially in women.
- Gonorrhoea can lead to infertility in women.
- Use condoms (male and female) and dams to prevent gonorrhoea infection.
- Sexually active women should discuss with their doctor whether they should be tested for gonorrhoea.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

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